

THE WELL-SPRINGS OF ACTION: AN ENQUIRY INTO 'HUMAN NATURE'

I

Richard Broxton Onians' (1951) book, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate*, is as exhaustive as the title suggests. Its value rests in enabling us to perceive the dim outlines of a theory of human powers which was present in the minds of the peoples of western Europe before the dawn of history. The phenomenology and osteology with which Onians supplemented the account, further enable us to locate the physiological processes on which the theory must have been based. It has been lost. Today we possess only fragments. And yet, we repeatedly make recourse to the theory in our behaviours and speech as if we knew its substance.

The hand is placed upon the chest when one pledges allegiance to one's country. To indicate assent, one nods one's head. Someone who is over-sexed is called 'horny'. In a Catholic church, one touches one's forehead and one genuflects before the altar. We associate the symbol of a skull and crossbones with death. We ascribe to ourselves the capacity of appreciating the 'aesthetics' of an object, and speak of the inspiration we receive from a speech.

These are but 'shreds and patches', but at one point they were connected. The theory rested on a primordial disjunction between fluid and air; between the liquid or liquefiable substances contained in the brain, the cerebro-spinal column, the genitals and joints, and the breath. In Latin, this opposition was expressed as one between the *genius* and the *animus*.

The *animus*, or 'breath-soul', was associated with the lungs, the seat of consciousness. This association lingers in the attitude one assumes when pledging allegiance. It was in the lungs that thoughts took shape in the form of words which were conceived of

not as sound-images but as breath-images. One of the earliest theories of perception held that 'breaths' emanate from objects in the world to combine with the 'breath' which emanates from the eyes to produce consciousness. The term aesthetic arose out of this association.

The *genius*, a kind of 'life-principle' associated with the unconscious and the sacred, was disseminated throughout various parts of the body. One propitiated it by massaging the forehead. One beseeched another's genius by clasping his knees. Onians quotes Pliny the Elder:

In a man's knees there is a certain sanctity observed by the nations. It is these that suppliant touch ... perhaps because in them is the life (*vitalis*). For in the joint of each knee ... there is in front a certain bulging cavity, on the piercing of which, as of the throat, the spirit flows away (p. 181).

The *genius* was the executive power in man. The semen and 'marrow' with which it was associated was 'the stuff of life and strength', just as the breath was 'the literal stuff of consciousness'. Among the Ancients, the reason why the nod was a binding and sacred form of promise lay in the fact that the life-principle contained in the head was involved. Horns, given familiarity with the promiscuous propensities of goats, were thought to be permanent concentrations of this life substance. They were embodiments of the seed, outcroppings of the procreative element. In order to signify death, the fact that the life-soul had departed, one placed the head of the deceased between his thighs. This custom has bequeathed to us the image of the skull and crossed thigh-bones, or *femurs*, 'that which engenders' (p. 182), but engenders no more.

What this brief foray amongst a complex body of ideas is meant to illustrate is that there is a code which persists beneath our actions. The lexical and behavioural items described above are messages of which the original interpretations have been forgotten or transformed in the course of time. Yet we continue to respond to the messages, and therefore the fragments of a once more comprehensive discourse. The associations linger; they are inscribed in our language. But the physiological processes, the phenomenology of the body in which these collective representations are grounded, could be subjected to a completely different articulation when framed within an alien tradition.

My concern in this paper will be with the powers that people who do not share our European heritage have ascribed to themselves. As Professor Needham (1980a) has indicated, this field of investigation discloses many discrepancies between the registers of inner states different peoples have devised. Given the inconsistencies, for instance, in the ascription of a capacity for belief (Needham 1972), our received ideas about what constitutes human nature must be disengaged. In their place, we must be prepared to accept one or the other of the following

conclusions. Either all the discriminations we encounter in alien vocabularies of psychological terms are true and therefore human nature is infinitely diverse; or the vocabularies are both true and false registrations. In order to ascertain those states which can be counted real as opposed to fictional, one could cull from vocabularies those terms which overlap in their specifications, determine the physiological processes to which these are meant to correspond, and consider at least a core of human universals settled on these grounds. As Professor Needham further notes, the problem then becomes one of how to account for inventions, states which are fictional in that they have no physiological concomitant.

What I am interested in are the fictions, and the development of a sociological framework within which to examine them. Towards this end, it is instructive to adopt an approach similar to that of Louis Dumont in *Homo Hierarchicus*. Dumont begins by positing two mutually exclusive 'encompassing frameworks' predicated on the ideas of hierarchy and equality respectively. Hierarchy and equality are principles of formal logic. They can be used to define the relationships which obtain within any given set of terms. It is for this reason that these principles are able to order and account for the existence of facts drawn from such dissimilar domains as economics, politics, marriage practices and religious observances.

One can assume, with considerable justification (Needham 1980b, Bateson 1973), that in elaborating their social institutions men continually make recourse to such relational principles as these. They are what we think and act with, given that any two bodies distributed in space must stand in some form of relationship to each other. The relationship can be one of hierarchy or equality, symmetry or asymmetry, opposition or analogy and so on. The realization of an asymmetric relation in a social setting can be observed, for example, in the practice of paying respect to those who are one's seniors, or in the unilateral flow of goods and persons between clans.

Traditionally, our psychology has focused not on these relationships, but on the individual in isolation. It will be seen that this hypostasization of the individual has in its turn had a profound effect on our psychology. For the sake of exposition, the individual must constitute our point of departure. But we can nevertheless distinguish between two contrasting orientations: the internal and the external. Each of us is engaged in a complex network of interactions with other persons and things. At a phenomenological level, it is possible either to focus exclusively on these relationships and so face outwards, away from the self. Inversely, it is conceivable to acknowledge these relationships not as primary, but only as given after the fact and so facing inwards. My argument is that psychology can be situated at either point on the inter-face between these contrasting orientations.

In illustration of internal orientation, I shall sketch briefly the manner in which psychology has been constituted within our own tradition. In illustration of an external orientation, I will draw on Herbert Fingarette's (1972) exegesis of Confucius'

Analects, and I.A. Richards' (1932) interpretation of Mencius. Following this, I wish to consider one anthropological case-study: What the Tanimbar islanders of eastern Indonesia conceive of as the well-springs of action with an attitude of mind open enough to receive them.

II

Marcel Mauss (1966) has traced the development of the category of 'the person' within our tradition, locating it as emerging at the juncture of Roman legal practices and Christian metaphysics. It is in part to Cassiodore, that we owe the constitution of this 'rational indivisible, individual substance' as a 'conscience and a category' (ibid., p. 358). The genesis of the category of 'the self' has been even more precarious, and is still in a process of formation (ibid., p. 359). Yet it pervades our outlook and has also informed our anthropology. We have a profound tendency to think in terms of individuals. Edmund Leach (1967) has commented that

It may be ... that conventional anthropology is at fault in thinking that the central problem of kinship studies is to show 'how individuals are linked together by relationship', for such a formulation implies that it is conceivable that individuals should not be linked together by relationships (p. 129).

By inverting this perspective, Leach argues, we arrive at a more accurate representation of experience. A mother and child are one before they become two. 'Our concern perhaps should not be with how relationships are formed but with how they become weakened' (ibid., p. 129).

The problem of how to connect things together if one starts from the assumption that they exist apart has been handled in an even more peculiar manner by psychologists. For example, it has led to the positing of libidinal and aggressive 'drives' located deep within the self in order for the individual to cathect various objects in the environment and so begin to forge relationships outwards. The circularity and logical inconsistency of such explanations of behaviour has been exposed by Bateson (1973: 25-26).

The same preliminary assumption has led to a grotesque proliferation in the discrimination of inner states within our tradition. The extensiveness of our vocabulary of psychological terms

in comparison with those of other cultures can be interpreted as proof that 'our psychology attempts ... to describe a larger range of the mind's possibilities' (Richards 1932: 80). But this has had deleterious results, for the discriminations have been further subjected to a normal/abnormal classification. Such 'abnormal' mental capacities as schizophrenia however, are not always due to chemical imbalances in the constitution of the individual. More enlightened research has revealed that such 'states' are often caused by pathologies and paradoxes in communication, a relation *between* human beings.

Still, each of these examples pales before the next, in which it will be seen that the perimeters of the self are expanded to include and reify the very relationships with the universe on which it depends:

When eventually the vocabulary of experimental psychology was extended to interpersonal contexts, the language of psychology still remained a monadic one. Concepts such as leadership, dependency, extroversion and introversion, nurturance and many others became the object of detailed study. The danger, of course, is that all these terms, if only thought and repeated long enough, assume a pseudoreality of their own, and eventually 'leadership', the construct, becomes Leadership, a measurable quantity in the human mind which is itself conceived as a phenomenon in isolation. Once this reification has taken place, it is no longer recognized that the term is but a shorthand expression for a particular form of ongoing relationship (Watzlawick 1967: 27).

The perennial problem has been one of failing to focus on the context of interaction and isolating entities instead. This inevitably leads to an inferential study of the properties of mind, when what we ought to be focusing on are observable manifestations of relationship.

III

One of the most vital respects in which the early Chinese tradition of enquiry into the constituents of human nature differs from our own is reflected in the fact that the distinction is not usually drawn between nature in general and human nature in particular. *H'sing* refers to both, together. As a result, as I.A. Richards

(1932) notes, 'the mind and its objects are not set over against one another ... psychology and physics are not two separated studies' (p. 5).

This non-separation can be taken as a preliminary indication of what we have called an 'external orientation'. This tenet alone implies a theory of mind which conceives of its powers of perception and thought as natural processes within the natural order. It also allows for associations which, given the distinctions embedded in our language, we would never make. In the thought of Mencius (372-289 BC), since man's nature and the nature of things are identical, it is conceivable that 'the very seasons fall out of order as disorder grows in the mind of ... the Ruler' (p. 76).

It is difficult to characterize the writings of Mencius as an actual enquiry into the nature of man. As Richards (op.cit., pp. 61-62) points out, his arguments were not demonstrations but instructions; his statements, in effect, edicts. The following argument (VI:1-4) between Kao Tzu and Mencius is a case in point.

Kao Tzu: Love [*Jen*] is internal, not external.
Right [*Yi* - in the sense of never contravening social etiquette] is external, not internal.

Mencius: Why do you say Love is internal, Right is external?

Kao Tzu: He is aged and I age [pay the proper social respect to] him, as I am his junior. Similarly, he is white and I recognize his whiteness. It follows that it [his whiteness] is white externally.

Mencius: Though recognizing whiteness in a horse and in a man are alike, is there not a difference between recognizing agedness in a man and in a horse? Moreover, would you say that it is his agedness [the perceiving of the other's seniority] that is Right, or the recognition of [paying respect to] his agedness which is Right?

Kao Tzu: If someone is my younger brother then I love him. If that person is a Chin's younger brother then I do not love him. This is in accordance with my pleasure. Thus, I call it internal. The fact that I age [pay respect to] the Chu people's aged, just as I age [pay respect to] our own aged, is according to age's pleasure. Hence, I call it external.

Mencius: My enjoyment of a roast cooked by a man of Chin differs in no way from my enjoyment of a similar roast cooked by my own people. This is true of many material things which are similar. If so, then is the enjoyment of a roast also something from without?

What Mencius does in this closing remark is to dissolve the distinction Kao Tzu makes between his own pleasure in loving someone, and the pleasure which the aged derive from his duty (which is implicitly an un-pleasure) of paying respect to them. Kao Tzu's response to the final question can only be in the negative (given the distinctions he had already drawn): one's enjoyment of a roast 'naturally' derives from within. This has a false ring because, given the way in which the question is posed, one could answer either way and still remain unconvinced. The answer is not 'either/or'. It is 'both', which shows that the distinction between internal and external, subjective and objective cannot be maintained.

Richards holds that one of the most salient features of this argument is that neither Mencius nor his opponent treat the rightness of paying respect to age as age as open to discussion. Consequently, they do not inquire into the reasons for giving respect, but 'treat only of *how* this respect is to be determined' (op.cit., p. 56). For this reason, a scientific account of human nature is precluded, or rather subverted to 'giving an account of it that will conduce to the maintenance of these fixed, unquestionable [social] observances' (ibid.).

The above interpretation is plausible, but at the same time misleading. A detailed examination of the text reveals that Mencius is concerned to distinguish between different qualities or manifestations of relationship. Thus, he distinguishes between the recognition of agedness in a man and in a horse. But he pays no attention to what we would perceive as the cause or origin in the person of the impulse which issues in the form of a relationship. Indeed, Mencius confounds the internal/external distinction Kao Tzu was trying to draw. His focus is on the relationships which obtain between a person and his social or physical milieu. This is the locus of psychology for Mencius, a psychology which is not separated from physics.

At first glance, Mencius does appear to be turning social conventions into human nature. In other words, he is writing an apology for the traditions of Chinese society. From an analytic perspective, we would not be prepared to accept the paying of respect to age as age as a natural resemblance among men. It is a convention. If we were to admit that such conventions are constituents of human nature, then we would also have to admit that this nature is infinitely diverse. But there is a sense in which this conclusion is beside the point to Mencius' argument. For him, human nature is located precisely at the junctures: the synapses between what, for lack of a better word, can be called the self, and others. It is the relationships which are human nature for Mencius.

Richards was on to this when he remarked: 'the division between *the outer cue and the inner impulse* ... remains unmade' (ibid., p. 54). Yet paradoxically, he regards this as a fault in the argument. He contends that Mencius prevented Kao Tzu from fully realizing his position, which could be stated as follows: our impulse to revere the aged comes from without. It is imposed upon us by society. But our impulse to love is from within. It is a natural feeling which is not determined by external characteristics, such as age, over which we have no control.

Such a distinction is natural to Western psychology perhaps, but it is unnatural for Mencius. Like Confucius, he had no need to posit such mysterious inner powers in order for 'affairs to proceed'.

Mencius viewed human nature, *h'sing*, as a complex of compulsions which are innately good, and which, if allowed, would naturally develop into the four virtues: *Jen* can be translated as 'love', though it has no romantic or sexual connotations. It has also been translated as 'benevolence', 'fellow-feeling' and 'humaneness'. *Yi* can be rendered as 'righteousness', and means 'the shame and dislike of having done the socially wrong thing'. *Li* refers to good form or propriety, conducting oneself correctly on ritual occasions and in the presence of officials. *Chih* denotes simply the capacity to discriminate.

Significantly, this vocabulary is essentially social in nature. The terms pertain primarily to our comportment and relationships. To desecrate any reference to inner states among them would be misleading. Yet Richards concludes that what Mencius understood by *h'sing* was

an activity or incipient activity ... which, if permitted tended always to self-development. *This tendency to self-development - to the fulfilment of the mind - was what he meant by its goodness* (ibid., p. 71).

Richards' choice of words is unfortunate, for the concepts of self and of fulfilment are not strictly apposite. If any sense at all is conveyed by the configuration of characters, it is a sense of non-self and of emptiness, of composure as opposed to completeness.

IV

In order to form a more accurate conception of the condition which the four virtues express, we might turn to Fingarette's (1972) illuminating though brief exegesis of the *Analects* of Confucius (551-479 BC). It should be noted that Fingarette is not concerned with the distance which might exist between ourselves and Confucius, but with the latter's immediacy, especially from the perspective of modern linguistic philosophy.

There are two main points to Fingarette's argument. The first is that the magical claims which Confucius makes need not be viewed as inconsistencies or residues in his otherwise secular writings. For Confucius viewed the well-learned ceremony, *li*, as the paradigm

for human action. There *is* a 'magical' quality to the deployment of human powers in such a setting.

In well-learned ceremony [Fingarette writes], each person does what he is supposed to do according to a pattern. My gestures are coordinated harmoniously with yours Our gestures are in turn smoothly followed by those of the other participants, all effortlessly (pp. 7-8).

Thus, when Confucius claims 'With correct comportment, no commands are necessary, yet affairs proceed' (XIII: 6), or again, with reference to the ruler's ritual position,

If there was a ruler who achieved order without taking any action, it was perhaps, Shun. There was nothing for him to do but to hold himself in a respectful posture and to face due south (XV: 5).

then what is meant by correct comportment is conformity to the civilized forms of intercourse detailed in *li*. This obliges the other without visibly forcing him to submit to one's wishes, in so far as these can be accommodated within the traditional forms of action. According to Fingarette (pp. 10-11), such acts do not differ qualitatively from the sequence of behaviour which is initiated by someone in Western society turning to another to shake his hand, or the making of a polite request to someone to go and retrieve a book. The latter act is 'magical' in the sense that action is accomplished at a distance. One finds the book in one's hands without having had to exert any energy.

One could question, as Richards would, whether Confucius was really so detached from his surroundings that he used *li*, 'the holy rite', as a metaphor to discuss the 'performative' aspects of human interaction. Fingarette (p. 45) categorically states that

the metaphor of an inner psychic life, in all its ramifications so familiar to us, simply isn't present in the *Analects*, not even as a rejected possibility.

The most difficult term to account for within this paradigm is *jen* which, as we saw above, evokes so many psychological associations when translated into English. If *jen* is truly devoid of subjective meaning, then its use in the following passage is somewhat puzzling.

The man of wisdom is never in two minds; the man of benevolence [*jen*] never worries [*yu*]; the man of courage is never afraid (IX: 29).

Worrying has a definite subjective resonance for us. If *jen* is its opposite, as the structure of the passage suggests, then *jen* must also refer to some inner state. However, if one examines other uses of the term *yu*, a quite different conception emerges as to the condition it refers to.

When asked about being filial, Confucius replied, 'Give your

father and mother no other cause for anxiety (*yu*) than illness' (II: 6). Similarly, a man without brothers is characterised as being *yu* (XII: 5), and the wise man is *yu* towards the future (XV: 12). Given that the times in which Confucius lived were full of social turmoil, these last two remarks can be understood to refer to the impossibility of being certain about the carrying out of one's future plans, and to the potentially dangerous situation of a man who has no family to turn to for protection. Indeed, what all three uses have in common is that they refer to conditions of objective uncertainty. There is an unsettled or troubled quality to the situation. But troubled and objectively uncertain need not refer to a mental state, for, just as a child's illness is an observable condition, so too is the objectively troubled response of the parents.

The condition of being *yu* therefore, is that of a person involved in and responding to an objectively unsettled situation, where a bad outcome is a distinct and evident possibility. It follows that the absence of *yu* refers to the condition of a man who is responding in a way that is well-integrated into an objectively settled and organized situation. In other words, the *jen*-man is the one who has, in Confucius' words, 'submitted to *li*' (XII: 1).

With our predilection for identifying inner states, we are prone to characterize *jen* as some mysterious inner power, given the obscurity with which it is portrayed. But a more suitable interpretation can be arrived at by viewing *jen* in conjunction with *li* as different aspects of the same phenomenon. The mode in which they differ should not be conceived in terms of a subjective/objective split, but rather as the difference which exists between the standpoint of an actor and that of an observer. It is the direction one gives an act, the aiming to submit to *li*, which is *jen*.

The distinction between these different facets of an action can be grasped in terms of the following analogy, deriving from Wittgenstein (1965: 150-51). One decides to greet someone, and does so. While there is a 'way' to make the greeting, there is no 'way', as such, to *decide* to greet someone. The making of a decision cannot be analyzed into steps consisting of mental as opposed to physical actions. The deciding and the greeting are in this sense 'indivisible'.

Perhaps the matter is easier to grasp in terms of another analogy. If one thinks of *li* as a score of music, and *jen* as a particular performance, as Fingarette notes (op. cit., p. 53),

we distinguish sensitive and intelligent musical performances from dull and unperceptive ones: detecting in the performance confidence and integrity [or perhaps, hesitation and uncertainty] We detect all this *in* the performance. We do not have to look into the psyche or personality of the performer. It is all 'there', public.

For Confucius, the locus of the personal is *in* the performance.

To summarize briefly the point at which we have arrived: we now have before us two distinct psychologies. The one constitutes

itself in terms of entities and sees its task as an inferential study of the properties of mind. There would seem to be some form of agreement between this kind of psychology and a civilization which possesses a highly elaborate construct of the self. The other psychology constitutes itself solely in terms of contexts and relationships. It is these which are demarcated in its vocabulary, and not 'inner states' as such. If the above conclusion is correct, it is somewhat ironic that Richards (op. cit., p. 56) should have characterized the virtues as the 'terminus' of Mencius' thought. In effect, the virtues constituted Mencius' point of departure. It is what we would call the mind, or human nature, which was the terminus. Richards' whole book is based on a false object of study. He attempts to look inwards from the circumference of the sphere, the corporeal self, at which Mencius' thought with respect to the virtues leaves off.

V

In the preceding pages we have rejected the construct of human nature and have suggested in its place the existence of a social nature. In the rest of this paper I should like to consider this problem in connection with the Tanimbar islanders of eastern Indonesia. A series of questions, abstracted from our previous investigations, can serve as guidelines for this enquiry.

The first concerns whether in Tanimbarese culture there is a highly developed construct of the self. If this construct is absent, or only vaguely formulated, then it is conceivable that their psychology will manifest a different orientation, or locus, from our own. It is then essential to determine the encompassing framework or formal principles in accordance with which the Tanimbarese interact. In so far as these determine the prevailing patterns of social intercourse, they also enter into the structure of the person, governing his or her expectations, intentions and awareness of being.

From this formal level of understanding, we then pass to the physiological. At the level of bodily processes, there exists the possibility of an unmediated appreciation of those promptings which lend themselves to symbolization as human powers. As will be seen however, correspondences at this level are only partial, and, more importantly, such tentative universals are always mediated by cultural categories. In the final analysis, the category of 'the natural' must be dissolved.

On the Tanimbar islands, the birth of a child is an event which precipitates a complex exercise in social classification. In addition to assuming a pre-existent locus in the relationship terminology, soon after birth the child is ceremonially assigned a name, *ngare* (Drabbe 1940: 145). If the child is a couple's first-born, it will be given the name of the father's father, or father's mother. The motivation for this selection lies in the fact that this child is the one most likely to reproduce the alliances of the previous generation. An eldest son or daughter can be obliged

to marry a person belonging to the category of *wai*, the mother's brother's daughter, or father's sister's son, depending on sex. The name of an eldest child, therefore, reflects a constant orientation, an enduring position constituted by a recurring set of relations.

If the child is born at a later stage, then a name is selected from among the register of those who have belonged to the house in the past. It is critical to choose the right name so as not to offend some ancestor. The latter want their names to 'return to life', and not 'go forgotten'. They will plague a child with illness if this is not done. Thus, sickness in infancy often leads to a change in names in an attempt to appease the ancestor.

Something of the significance of this relationship to one's ancestral namesake can be grasped from the fact that the namesake is constantly propitiated. A youth will call upon his namesake to sit upon the tips of his arrows to ensure a good hunt (*ibid.*, pp. 146-47). If the namesake is unhelpful in this respect, then another is found. This involves yet another change in name. The import of this slippage from one name to another is that each denotes a different orientation in relation to the universe. From the condition of illness, one passes to health. Each name signifies a different appearance.

In addition to a personal name, the Tanimbarese also bear and call other people by their *ngar'memet*, which Drabbe translates as 'shame-name'. It is expressive of the relationship of respect and avoidance which obtains between opposite-sexed members of the same clan, and between affines, save for those who are classified as *wai*. With the latter, as with members of one's own clan who are of the same sex and also called *wai*, there is familiarity. These persons one can hail from afar, speak rudely to, or embrace (*ibid.*).

A Tanimbarese then, is known by different names in different contexts. To locate an individual, a 'rational, indivisible substance' behind the names, is somewhat problematic. Different occasions entail different compartments and the attitude in each case is a feature of the relationship, not of the person.

In this regard, one could claim that the distinction between the outer cue and the inner impulse remains unmade. Yet such an observation has no analytic value. Drabbe records for example that one may not embrace or kiss a blood-sister other than on the occasion of a reunion after a lengthy absence (*ibid.*, p. 145). The question arises whether this impulse is any more natural than the inclination to avoid contact with her on all other occasions. Were a man to embrace his blood-sister in some other situation, the behaviour would be recognized as out of context. It is the occasions, not the impulses which are incommensurate.

One further hindrance towards locating the individual as a 'rational, indivisible substance' within Tanimbarese culture is that he or she may not be entirely assembled in one place at one time. If a child whines continually, it is because its soul has remained in the last place it was at with the parents, such as the garden-house (*ibid.*, p. 396). An expedition must be made to retrieve the soul. Threads are then tied about the child's wrists

and ankles to bind the soul.

VI

Drabbe states that the most powerful, influential and wealthy members of a community are those notables who are Masters of the eldest house, *das kajain* in each clan. In order to maintain its status, the eldest house must reaffirm its marital alliances with other noble houses in each successive generation. In order to exercise a maximum degree of influence, a nobleman must also have many series of people who 'tap palmwine', for him and not so many who 'supply [him] with loin-cloths and sarongs', (ibid., p. 187). These expressions refer to a house's *oeranak*, or wife-takers and *ndoewe*, or wife-givers respectively.

The complementarity of 'tapping palmwine', which refers to the prestation of goods classified as masculine, and the reciprocal 'supplication of loin-cloths and sarongs' which encompasses all goods classified as feminine, is the fulcrum of Tanimbarese society. No prestations can flow in the opposite direction, as for instance, were a wife-giver to give a pair of gold earrings, which are classified as masculine, to his wife-taker.

The pervasiveness of this principle of asymmetry in the orientation of social life on Tanimbar is unequalled by any other. It determines economic relations, political relations, and attendance at life-crisis rites. But in the domain of marriage regulations it gives way: one may marry either a *bat ndoewe*, a mother's brother's daughter, or a *bat waljête*, 'strange woman'. This element of contingency, or possibility of choice could be seen to contradict the structure of Tanimbarese society were it not for the fact that an *oeranak* who is recalcitrant either in supplying his *ndoewe* with the goods he wishes, or who refuses to marry the latter's daughter, may find himself poisoned, or trapped in a burning house (ibid., p. 191). Violence is the last recourse when the civilized forms of intercourse break down.

VII

Drabbe's (1932) dictionary of the language spoken on Jamdena, the largest island in the Tanimbar group, enables us to gain a sense of those powers which the Jamdanese recognize as human attributes. But there are grave difficulties involved in trying to list these. For instance, *bengeol*, 'to have a belly ache' looks straightforward, whilst *mat*, 'to be ashamed' is less so. For while the term may denote an inner state, the Chinese *yi*, which can also be translated as 'shame', has no such reference. Even more troublesome is the term *nabwai*, 'to transform or change into a crocodile', for how is

this to be included in a list of human powers? The problem is one of criteria. However another route is to focus on those powers in Jamdanese which we discriminate in English as well, and which we know have a physiological reference - such as anger.

In Jamdanese, 'to be angry' is *dalam méfanas*, literally 'someone hot'. At first sight the Jamdanese *méfanas* appears to correspond with our English 'hot under the collar'. But it is important to look further. From the same root, *-fanas*, the term *nafanas*, 'to be sick', is derived, as well as *nfanas*, 'to heat liquid'. *Méfanas* itself has a further application. One says of someone who touches the 'hot' sirih-pouch of an elder that his fingers will become 'knotted', meaning that he will receive heat blisters. The sirih-pouch is 'hot' because it contains the elder's soul-images, which no-one may touch except the owner. Were a child to touch them, it would become *nafanas*, 'sick'.

A pregnant woman ought not to journey by sea as the capes are dangerous for her. These are 'hot' because corpses and heads which have been taken in battle are often left on such promontories to rot (Drabbe 1940: 375). Other things which are *méfanas* are: the bride-price for a woman when it is assembled in a house waiting to be received, the bones of the dead, food which has been offered to the dead, warriors when they have just returned from a raid, and a man who has just seen two snakes copulating in the wood (ibid.). Riedel (1886: 285) informs us that seeing two snakes copulating in a dream is a premonition of a great wealth which will accrue to one in the near future. From this list it is possible to abstract a number of principles on which this classification of 'hot' persons and things is based. The common feature which articulates this category is that of a disturbance in the ordinary course of events, such as unexpected wealth accruing. This disturbance is often associated with a departure, or something which has departed from life. Thus for example wife-givers, about to receive the bride-price, are said to fear it. The wife-takers assuage this fear by pointing out that, 'these things are hot, but the sarong of the woman will cool them'. What this expression would seem to refer to is that once the moment of exchange is passed, the woman and the bride-price having changed hands, things return to their ordinary state in which 'hot' and 'cool' are balanced.

To sum up, then, 'anger' may be present in a given Tanimbarese context, and it would be only natural for a Western observer to recognize it. But this concept is extraneous to the logic with which the Tanimbarese system of classification operates. It may be that gesticulations used are simply a conventional form of behaviour which only we recognize as anger. It is ironic that even with far superior 'logical machinery' which Richards (1932: 102) has attributed to our modes of thought, in such a context as this, it is the Western observer who fails to make 'the distinction between the outer cue and the inner impulse'. I have attempted to show that a people who do not share our intellectual heritage, and predilection for 'interiorising' things, may not have committed the same errors in their thinking as we have (cf Bateson 1973: 460).

There is another word in Jamdanese, *ere* which means 'to be

hot-, or quick-tempered'. This may be our anger. There is not the linguistic information to prove otherwise. Thus, the question becomes: is to be quick or jerking in one's movements a natural or conventional form of behaviour? At a higher level of abstraction, the question arises: where does metaphor, or convention leave off and the real, or natural commence?

I trust this paper has led us some of the way towards an understanding of the fact that such a distinction is unnecessary - indeed entirely arbitrary.

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