WITTGENSTEIN AND EVANS-PRITCHARD ON RITUAL: TWENTY-TWO REASONS TO THINK THAT WITTGENSTEIN WAS AN ANTHROPOLOGIST

PHILIPPE DE LARA

Introduction

I would like to begin not with Wittgenstein, but with Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and E. E. Evans-Pritchard. What I mean by Wittgenstein's 'anthropology' should then appear more clearly.

When I began working on Wittgenstein and anthropology, it seemed to me that the issue had been dealt with, in its fundamentals, in the British debate of the 1960s on rules, rationality, and relativism. Among the ingredients of the debate were Peter Winch's writings (e.g. 1958, 1970 [1964]) on the social sciences,[1] the reception among anthropologists of W. V. O. Quine's doctrine of radical translation and conceptual schemes (Quine 1960; cf., e.g., Douglas 1975), and John Beattie's theory of symbols (Beattie 1964: 66–9, 227; 1966: 68–72). In many ways, the debate appeared to be a revival of the discussion pursued at the beginning of the twentieth century, in which the intellectualist explanations of magic by Tylor and Frazer were opposed by their critics, Durkheim, Mauss, and Lévy-Bruhl.

[1] Winch was a Wittgensteinian of the first rank and later, after Rush Rhees's death, became one of the executors of Wittgenstein's literary estate

French sociologists then argued that beliefs should not be given either rational or psychological justifications, but be explained through the social patterns and social pressures that shaped them. In the French school, these patterns were named *représentations collectives*, an appealing but obscure phrase. Furthermore, Lévy-Bruhl insisted that 'mystical thought' should be understood not in terms of intellectual or cognitive beliefs but in terms of what he called an 'affective and intellectual complex' in which the affective element was dominant. He used to quote an Inuit shaman, who said of supernatural forces, 'We do not believe, we fear' (see, e.g., Lévy-Bruhl 1936: 22). Lévy-Bruhl appears therefore as the precursor of both Beattie's symbolic theory of belief and Rodney Needham's strong relativism (1972: 151 and passim).

Evans-Pritchard was, obviously, a central figure in the 1960s and most of the examples in the debate were taken from his books, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937), *The Nuer* (1940), and *Nuer Religion* (1956); notably his accounts of the *benge* poison oracle of the Azande and the famous Nuer proposition that 'twins are birds', which was then reaching the status of a paradigm. Also, had he not, as early as the 1930s, published two papers, one on Frazer and Tylor and one on Lévy-Bruhl, basically mapping out the later discussion (Evans-Prichard 1933, 1934)? A central figure and yet a silent one; for me, this constituted a puzzle. How is it that Evans-Pritchard contributed nothing to the 1960s debate, that he never made a comment? There is a significant anecdote here, reported to me by Wendy James. Two major contributions at that time were the article by Peter Winch entitled 'Understanding a Primitive Society' (1964, also 1970) and a response to it by Alasdair MacIntyre (1967, also 1970). A debate between Winch and MacIntyre was held in Oxford, in the presence of Evans-Pritchard. One can imagine how thrilling his presence was for the speakers and the audience, but he didn't say a word. When asked for a comment before leaving, he merely replied, 'It was very interesting but, you know, Azande have no cattle!'; presumably one of the speakers had invented an example involving cattle or confused the Azande and the Nuer.

The obvious interpretation of Evans-Pritchard's apparent attitude to the debate would be that it displays his empiricist irony and his caution about theorizing, his adoption of the fieldworker's typical predicament, far removed from philosophical conceit. This would fit with the iconic picture of Evans-Pritchard as provided, for example, by Clifford Geertz's (1988) portrait of him. I wish to show that this iconic view of Evans-Pritchard is a myth. Not only was Evans-Pritchard a great theorist, it was his main ambition to be so, this being the underlying drive of his work, from the 1930s until his very last writings. Is this opinion an ethnocentric projection by a philosopher? Let us see.

Making Sense of Lévy-Bruhl

Evans-Pritchard belonged to the small but distinguished number of scholars who acknowledged the importance of Lévy-Bruhl, a group that did not include, for example, either Mauss or Beattie, but did include Lucien Febvre, Maurice Leenhardt, Pierre Clastres, and Cornelius Castoriadis. As for Wittgenstein, there is no evidence that he was acquainted with Lévy-Bruhl, nor do we need it; there are, however, striking similarities between Lévy-Bruhl's views and Wittgenstein's. I wish to show that what is similar between them is precisely what Evans-Pritchard appreciated in Lévy-Bruhl's challenging thought.

The number of Lévy-Bruhl's appreciators is small because, at first sight, Lévy-Bruhl's work has always seemed outdated and boring. His six books on *la mentalité primitive* (1910, 1922, 1927, 1931, 1935, 1938) restate the same ideas again and again, and struggle to provide the proper expression of claims he thought doomed to ineffability. Pathetic to be sure, but not fruitful. His interests and methods seem limited to a narrow kind of second-hand 'fact' and a narrow range of questions. With him, mystical beliefs seem to float nowhere: he was unconcerned about the structure and life of the societies from which these 'facts' were extracted. He knew and admired masterpieces of fieldwork—reporting, notably, those of Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Evans-Pritchard himself— but he thought that he was doing something else. Nor was he committed to the deep theoretical controversies of his time about primitive religion; in fact he thought that, apart from the word itself, 'primitive religion' had very little in common with *religion*, a view strongly opposed to Durkheim's. In a postscript to a letter to Evans-Pritchard, written in 1934 and published posthumously in 1952, he wrote:

> What has led me to write my books is not the desire to add, if I could, a stone to the edifice of this special science (anthropology, ethnology). I had the ambition to add something to the scientific knowledge of human nature using the findings of ethnology for the purpose. (Lévy-Bruhl 1952: 123)

Nevertheless, Evans-Pritchard was right to consider Lévy-Bruhl an important writer. Not that he agreed with his views, as we shall see, but Lévy-Bruhl's merit is to have posed, in radical terms, an original and relevant problem. As I see it, this problem can be grasped using the following formula: the idea of a dualism between two kinds of thought, mystical and empirical (or imaginary and rational), in the study of primitive societies is both inescapable and inconsistent. Most scholars ignore or understate this problem. Lévy-Bruhl attempted to account for it with his tentative concepts of 'the pre-logical', 'mystical participation', and 'the affective category of the supernatural'. He must be credited for this, while even the weaknesses of his account are pregnant with an important lesson. Lévy-Bruhl was not a mere precursor alluding to the symbolic dimension of rituals but lacking the

concept of the symbol or an understanding of the linguistic or formal nature of social institutions, for instance kinship or marriage rules; which was, roughly, Beattie's opinion.[2] Lévy-Bruhl's concepts of 'primitive mentality' and of an 'affective category of the supernatural' are, however, closer to modern structural anthropology than the concept of 'phlogiston' is to modern chemistry. To put it briefly, Lévy-Bruhl conceived the dualism between the mystical and the empirical as a huge, unamenable challenge for the social sciences. Evans-Pritchard's insight was to recognize fully the relevance of this challenge, while other sociologists and anthropologists tended to minimize it. From Pareto to Beattie, including Malinowski among others, the question of the intelligibility of mystical thought, as presented in a radical mode by Lévy-Bruhl, has been too easily dismissed. Evans-Pritchard's aim was to take this challenge seriously. He did this in his book on the Azande.

The Azande are, so to speak, a Lévy-Bruhlian people. The importance of witchcraft, oracles, and magic in their lives allows for the depiction of a people who are 'immersed in a sea of mystical notions' (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 320) in their daily lives. For Evans-Pritchard, making sense of Zande mystical practices would be a response to Lévy-Bruhl. Although we must admit with Lévy-Bruhl that 'mystical thinking' is utterly different from what we consider rational or empirical thinking, this does not make it impenetrable or incommensurable, as the relativists would later say. The truth of Lévy-Bruhl's point is that the pervasive presence of mystical thought must be taken seriously, even if he overestimated it by ignoring the whole system of social life and social institutions. This pervasiveness precludes a Malinowski-like model, that is, a bold dualism: people are either rational or mystical, sometimes mystical when they fish on the high seas, among untamed dangers, sometimes rational (or 'technical') when they fish in the peace of the lagoon. Pierre Clastres, among others, is an heir of Lévy-Bruhl's when he writes that, in Amazonian societies, 'religious concern is pervasive to the point that the distinction between secular and religious seems to dissolve, so that the boundaries between secular and sacred vanish: nature, like society, is pervaded by the supernatural' (1980: 64; my translation).

Lévy-Bruhl insists that this mode of thought has deep philosophical consequences, challenging our basic categories by introducing a type of representation that mixes concepts and emotions (see, for instance, his 1936). In his preface to Lévy-Bruhl's posthumously published *Carnets*, his pupil and friend Maurice Leenhardt commented on the key concept of the *catégorie affective du surnaturel*

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[2] Beattie writes of Lévy-Bruhl (1970: 258–9): 'if the terms "mystical" and "pre-logical" are interpreted as applying respectively to beliefs, not founded in experience, in the potency of symbols and symbolic procedures, and to the association of ideas in terms of metaphor rather than of real identity...then he may not unreasonably be represented as holding, or at last foreshadowing, the position held by those of us who assert that the symbolic, and the practical, "scientific" ways or aspects of thinking may be usefully distinguished.'

by writing that Lévy-Bruhl understood mystical experience as 'the affective fringe which borders every human experience and may even monopolize it' (Leenhardt 1975 [1949]: xviii). I wish now to emphasize three aspects of Lévy-Bruhl's view.

The first aspect is the pervasiveness of mysticism, as opposed to theories of the separation of secular and sacred, natural and supernatural, mystical and empirical, and so forth. Lévy-Bruhl himself stressed the intertwining of the two modes of thought. The 'mystical' is a continuous 'orientation', always ready to override the ordinary representation of reality: 'the whole life of the "primitive", from birth to death, and even beyond, is saturated, as it were, by the supernatural' (1936: 5). The second aspect is the universality of primitive mentality. Primitive cultures display, in a more vivid and thus more visible mode, what is ultimately a universal fact of the human mind. Lévy-Bruhl felt the conflict between two opposed truths that he tried to hold simultaneously—the *différence réelle* of the primitives, their having 'a logic different from ours', and the universality of the human mind—as a terrible dilemma. The third aspect is Lévy-Bruhl's attempt to describe this 'different thinking' in terms of a combination of intellectual and affective elements. In his posthumously published *Carnets*, Lévy-Bruhl (1975 [1949]) insists that, in primitive mentality, mystical experience is on the same footing as the other. Magic is therefore not symbolic at all. It is metaphorical only in that the nature and action of supernatural forces is ineffable, so people have to convey supernatural causation through natural images. This is neither an expressive nor a symbolic theory of magic.

Evans-Pritchard grasped the originality and ambiguity of this account in an illuminating way: it sounds psychological, but it is actually sociological. Lévy-Bruhl's limitation is, precisely, to have given a psychological twist to an important sociological insight. Evans-Pritchard reads Lévy-Bruhl as a Durkheimian who is aiming at a sociological explanation of belief, instead of the psychological explanations of Tylor and Frazer, treating the plausibility of mystical belief in terms of primitive ignorance, the association of ideas, and so forth. Yet he rightly draws attention to analogies between Lévy-Bruhl and Frazer, namely the psychologistic fallacy common to both in confusing the content of belief with its cause. Lévy-Bruhl is systematically ambiguous: the concept of mystical thought refers here to some content, there to a mental state. But we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Here are two quotations from Evans-Pritchard's essay on Lévy-Bruhl (originally published in 1934 but republished in 1970 in the second issue of *JASO*), which may be taken as expressing the programme of his whole work:

> To Tylor and Frazer the savage believes in magic because he reasons incorrectly from his perception of similarities and contiguities.[3] To Lévy-Bruhl the

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[3] In other words, the universal laws of the association of ideas.

savage reasons incorrectly because he believes in magic.... 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.[4] Unless there is a mutual dependence between ideas we cannot speak of thought at all. (1970 [1934]: 55)

Evans-Pritchard continues, remarking that, unlike Tylor and Frazer,

> 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.... But a representation is not acceptable to the mind merely because it is collective. It must accord with individual experience and if it does not do so then the representation must contain an explanation of its failure to do so.... 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.... 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.[5] (ibid.: 55–6)

To summarize, Evans-Pritchard praises Lévy-Bruhl's identification of the problem of the specific nature of mystical thought but rejects Lévy-Bruhl's solution through three crucial shifts: from a psychological to a sociological account, from ineffability to rational intelligibility, and from an abstract philosophy of mind to anthropological (and historical) comparison.

Wittgenstein's Concept of Ritual Action and Evans-Pritchard's Account of Mysticism

Close scrutiny of Wittgenstein's sketchy remarks on Frazer suggests that he was struggling with Lévy-Bruhl's problem, that is, the very problem addressed in *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic*: how to make sense of mystical thought, once we

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[4] In using the term 'collective representations', of course, Evans-Pritchard is here referring to Durkheim; Lévy-Bruhl did not use this phrase. Evans-Pritchard is stressing the Durkheimian aspect of Lévy-Bruhl here, rather than the differences between Lévy-Bruhl and the Année sociologique.

[5] Here again, although Lévy-Bruhl himself did not do so explicitly, Evans-Pritchard refers to the Durkheimian theory of social facts.

refuse both intellectualist reduction and dualism?[6] As I reconstruct it from his sketchy and fragmentary notes, Wittgenstein's point about mysticism (to use Lévy-Bruhl's and Evans-Pritchard's phrase, which was not his: he spoke of 'ritual action', in line with his idea of the primacy of action over 'opinion') is twofold.

First, 'ritual' thought and behaviour are reactions of a certain kind to important or mysterious facts. This type of behaviour and the corresponding beliefs are utterly different from the rational or instrumental type. Magic, for instance, is not a technique based on mistaken science. Although the expression of feelings may be a feature of some mystical or ritual behaviour, this is not a necessary feature. Wittgenstein was sympathetic to the standard contrast between mystical thought as false belief and mystical thought as symbolic expression, but there are two important differences between expressivism and Wittgenstein's anti-intellectualism; Wittgenstein's point here is closely akin to Evans-Pritchard's.

As already noted, the expression of emotions, feelings, and desires is not the distinctive feature of mystical thought: ritual thinking may be either 'cold' or 'warm'. Ordinary human facts are as good candidates to be objects of ritual as the wonders of nature, peaceful regularities as good as tremendous unprecedented events, and cold 'aesthetic experiences' as good as warm emotional facts:

> a man's shadow, which looks like him, or his mirror-image, the rain, thunderstorms, the phases of the moon, the changing of the seasons, the way in which animals are similar to and different from one another and in relation to man, the phenomena of death, birth, and sexual life, in short, everything we observe around us year in and year out. (Wittgenstein 1993a: 127)

Evans-Pritchard also insists that mystical thought cannot be defined by emotion, since we cannot distinguish magic by reference to the emotional mood of the participants: 'emotional states are determined by the nature of the disease and not by the nature of the leechcraft [i.e. the cure]' (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 505). As any other beliefs, mystical ones are constrained by logical consistency and empirical facts. Also, according to Wittgenstein, there is something wrong in the dualist theory. Beliefs are not *either* empirical *or* mystical. We must account for the intertwining of both modes of thought. This is, I believe, the meaning of a statement like: 'One could almost say that man is a ceremonial animal. That is, no doubt, partly wrong and partly nonsensical, but there is also something right about it' (Wittgenstein 1993a: 129).[7] This may be compared with Evans-Pritchard's statement

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[6] It is an intriguing fact of intellectual history that what we now know as Wittgenstein's remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1993a) were composed at the time Evans-Pritchard was completing and publishing the Zande book. I find it strange that Wittgenstein completely ignored Evans-Pritchard's existence and work and vice versa, despite their both being close to Catholic circles and in Oxford in the post-war years.

[7] I discuss this statement at length elsewhere; see de Lara 2003.

that 'patterns of thought of a mystical kind are never exclusively mystical' (1970: 54).

Wittgenstein's two claims are therefore very close to Evans-Pritchard's views. Both writers criticize psychological explanations of mysticism and reject the dualist scheme, trying instead to account for the unity of the mind. Evans-Pritchard emphasizes the 'situational' setting of beliefs, what I call his contextual principle: 'each situation demands the peculiar mode of thought appropriate to it. Hence an individual in one situation will employ a notion he excludes in a different situation' (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 349). This means: that social facts cannot be adequately described in abstraction from their interrelations with other social facts; that beliefs are not independent atoms, but exist in networks, under constraint from consistency; and that mystical beliefs are functions of certain situations: Zande mysticism is 'a behaviour rather than a belief'. Therefore, the consistency of Zande reasons to believe must not be assessed by reference to logical or psychological criteria but by reference to institutions and situations, that is, through a sociological mode of explanation. But this is not narrowly intended, since

> 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. (Evans-Pritchard 1970: 54)

Let me digress a moment. Like many of Evans-Pritchard's statements, this looks like an incidental, almost trivial remark. But we must not be misled by his skilful writing. This small example is pregnant with consequences. It reminds us that mystical causation and natural causation can be invoked together, that there are intermediate or controversial cases: the very same action may be performed 'as magic, or play, or simple expression of a wish' (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 464). Moreover, the way Evans-Pritchard handles the concept of social situation does not lead to a social determinism, as with the Marxist theory of ideology. Speaking of common or collective meanings does not mean that society operates by providing the content of everybody's mind, since everybody's mind contains individual beliefs, individuals' reasons for acting and believing. In his *Essais sur l'individualisme*, Louis Dumont (1983: 211–14) argues that Evans-Pritchard's method outlines *une systématique des situations* (a systematic account of situations) that is able to overcome the limitations of the concept of collective representation.

Two other aspects of Wittgenstein's claims must be mentioned for their affinity with Evans-Pritchard's views. First, an important claim in Wittgenstein's lectures on Frazer in the 1930s was the rejection of the prejudice of the unique cause, that is, 'the tendency to explain a phenomenon by one cause'. He insisted that 'utility is not always the unique reason' (1979: 33). This seems trivial but is not,

otherwise everyone would be as good as Evans-Pritchard was at understanding human societies. Wittgenstein's argument is twofold: it is an instance of his general warning against the untimely generalizations of locally sound theories—for instance, Freud's claim that every dream is (must be) the expression of an unconscious desire; and, since 'utility is not always the unique reason', instrumental explanations should not be considered as ubiquitous or exclusive (the unique reason). This mode of explanation is not always relevant, and even when it is, it does not exhaust the phenomena to be explained. Moreover, a feature of the modern scientistic stance is the overwhelming import given to instrumental explanations of behaviour (notably under the influence of the evolutionary pattern of thought). Fighting against this seduction was one of the deepest motives (and motifs) of Wittgenstein's anthropological thinking.

Along similar lines, Evans-Pritchard shows (rather than explicitly stating) that explanation in the social sciences cannot be exclusive, that is, it must not look for universal patterns of explanation of a given type of phenomenon such as magic. The same ritual may be instrumental on one occasion, expressive on another. Furthermore, the very nature of the social sciences precludes ultimate and exclusive patterns of explanation. When he explains that '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' (1970: 57), he is using a functionalist pattern of explanation: witchcraft contributes to political integration in Zande society. But witchcraft is also further analysed. First, it is analysed as a kind of metaphysics (a 'natural philosophy'), the solution to the problem of the indeterminacy of the future in the Zande *Weltbild*:

> present and future have not entirely the same meaning for Azande as they have for us. Time has a different value. It is difficult to formulate the problem in our language, but it would appear from their behaviour (I am not speaking of expressed patterns of thought) that the present and future overlap in some way so that the present partakes of the future as it were. (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 347)

Secondly, Evans-Pritchard emphasizes that, for Azande themselves, witchcraft is not always the cause of death and misfortune; while thirdly, the political explanation mentioning vendetta groups is not a final one but requires the further investigation of Zande politics; and fourthly, witchcraft is not explained as an isolated item, but as part of a system of mystical thought and practice, a 'triangle' also including oracles and magic.

I now take up the second aspect of Wittgenstein's claims that has affinity with Evans-Pritchard's views. Wittgenstein's philosophy of psychology tries to give a unified view of the 'realm of the psychological', which mitigates against the sharp distinctions between emotion and belief, or between justifying reasons and affective or social causes in the explanation of belief. This point is outlined in the

'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*' and developed at a conceptual level in his later writings, for instance in his analysis of emotion (published in the second volume of his *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*; Wittgenstein 1980a). This conceptual analysis does not aim at criticizing and abandoning our ordinary psychological concepts and the underlying distinctions. As such, they are 'perfectly in order'; but a perspicuous view of their 'grammar' will allow for overlapping, continuity, and filiation between these concepts as part of their differences. Now, the same idea is fully (although informally) introduced by Evans-Pritchard in his own synthesis of Frazer's intellectualism and Lévy-Bruhl's 'affective category of the supernatural'.

The celebrated twenty-two Zande reasons to believe in magic (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 475–8) are more than a masterpiece of scientific irony. They show (again without saying as much) that reasons and social (or affective) causes in the explanation of belief cannot be sharply distinguished, and that their distinction can make sense only by paying attention to 'intermediate cases', to use Wittgenstein's phrase. Reason 17 ('having no clocks, they cannot perceive that placing a stone in a tree in no way retards sunset'), is a typical instance of the intellectualist pattern of explanation. But it does not conflict with the fact that magic is sometimes invoked in a symbolic way ('a successful hunter gets a reputation for magic'; reason 15). And how should we consider the idea that magical beliefs are socially inherited (reasons 8, 9, 19), or that magic is performed under social compulsion in some circumstances (reason 14), or that political authorities support vendetta magic (reason 16); why should these be called *reasons* and not *causes*? How should we classify the fact that 'foreign medicines are vouched for by the peoples who use them' (reason 20)? Reason and cause, rationality and mysticism, are essentially plastic notions. Social causation exists, but social causes necessarily present themselves as meanings. As Evans-Pritchard puts it, they have an 'intellectual structure'. Therefore, they cannot be apprehended as mere functions, nor as mere feelings. They could not be causes were they not reasons. This has rightly been described by David Pocock (1961: 76) as 'a movement from function to meaning'.

In other words, what seemed puzzling in Wittgenstein, namely that the rational explanation of behaviour must not and cannot preclude its ritual dimension, appears, in the light of Evans-Pritchard's empirical achievement, to be a fruitful principle of investigation. What is more Lévy-Bruhlian than Evans-Pritchardian in Wittgenstein is his emphasis on the limits of the explanation of rituals, the idea that not everything should be explained. But this is not an opinion on the incommensurability of the savage mind from a rational point of view, as in Lévy-Bruhl's work. Rather, Wittgenstein's point is that some universal features of the human predicament cannot be properly explained. Of them we can only say: 'this is what human life is like' (Wittgenstein 1993a: 121).

This leads on to the second aspect of Wittgenstein's 'point about mysticism', as I see it. It was Wittgenstein's view that a 'ritual instinct' underlies many if not

all human practices. Here Wittgenstein probably parts from Evans-Pritchard, indeed from anthropology as an empirical science. Nevertheless, his point is relevant from an anthropological point of view. Ritual instinct is a central and pervasive feature of human action. It belongs to expressive as well as to instrumental rites, to purely instinctive as well as to reflectively elaborated ones. Wittgenstein is not saying, of course, that all rites are the mere result of an instinctive impulse and nothing else (common sense and the other examples he gives preclude this claim), but that ritual instinct lies at the root of all rites and is the underlying condition of their intelligibility, notwithstanding further levels of explanation and understanding (genetic, instrumental, cultural, etc.). So rituality is a human disposition to react in a certain way—typically pointless—towards 'significant phenomena', and is demonstrated not only by instituted rites (magic, religion) but also in other contexts, private and social. A striking feature of Wittgenstein's own examples of rites is that they are not socially prescribed rites like those an anthropologist would consider. Instead, he envisages private rites, created by a single person and performed only once, or occurring under individual compulsion. Among his examples (Wittgenstein 1993a: 123ff.) are: kissing a portrait of one's beloved; burning an effigy of an enemy (in fact, an intermediate case between private impulse and social ceremony); Schubert's brother's ceremony at the death of the composer, cutting the latter's manuscript scores into small pieces and sharing them out to Schubert's friends (probably the purest case of ritual instinct according to Wittgenstein's theory); pursing one's lips when someone laughs too loud; beating the ground when one is angry; saying 'I fear the wrath of the gods'.

It seems that rites are not essentially social practices. Yet we should not understand that Wittgenstein denied the social nature of rites (and more generally of mankind), for as he once wrote, 'a game, a language, a rule is an institution' (Wittgenstein 1978: 334). Rather, he is focusing here on another dimension of human behaviour, a dimension that calls for the kind of conceptual anthropology he offers, rather than a fieldwork anthropology he, unlike armchair anthropologists, does not pretend to offer. In Wittgenstein's work, 'instinct' has a very wide and non-technical use. He claims that 'instinct comes first, reasoning second' (1980a: 116e, §689). This applies to various behaviours and cognitive attitudes: having hinge beliefs like 'the world existed before my birth'; 'primitive reactions' like brushing a fly off one's body or 'reacting to the cause', like following a string to find out who is pulling at it—according to Wittgenstein, this kind of immediate 'reaction' contrasts with Hume-like inference of a causal connection from regularity or contiguity (Wittgenstein 1993b: 387); 'natural expressions' of emotions and pain, and more generally pre-linguistic expressions; and 'blindly' following a rule (when one 'masters a technique'). Instinct is not opposed to reflectiveness: manifestations of ritual instinct range, without sharp boundaries, from purely compulsory reactions (beating the ground when one is angry) to elaborated ceremonies, including 'half-involuntary' actions (pursing one's lips). As he remarked in 1948,

'we must not forget: even our most sophisticated, more philosophical interrogations have an instinctive ground' (1980b: 73). Doubt itself, a rational and reflective activity *par excellence*, 'is an instinctive form of behaviour' (1980a: 111e, §644). The categories of instinctive and reflective behaviour must not be understood as mutually exclusive categories. Instinct lies also at the bottom of rational behaviour: there are intermediate and mixed cases. For instance, in virtuoso music-playing, automatic gestures, the instinctive playing of scales, and following the beat are integral to thoughtful, sensitive interpretation. I think these insights provide useful clarifications of sociological puzzles about whether agents are consciously aware or not of the meaning of their behaviour and situation.

For Wittgenstein, it was a very important moral point (a matter of self-knowledge) to understand that the ability of human beings to produce pointless yet meaningful behaviour is not madness nor something negligible. One of the best expressions of his views about explaining human action is the following: 'What I have to do is something like describing the office of a king—in doing which I must never fall into the error of explaining the kingly dignity by the king's usefulness, but I must leave neither his usefulness nor his dignity out of account' (1978: 357). So emphasizing rituality (mysticism) does not go against human rationality. Rather, pointless rituals are the flesh of it, as instinct is integral to reflective behaviour.

This view is more relevant to anthropology than it might appear at first sight. What he had in mind, I think, was accounting for the unique human capacity to create immensely various 'forms of life', and to lead us to recognize that, just like 'primitive' and 'traditional' modes of life, our 'rational' institutions, rules, and patterns of behaviour are embedded in the game of forms and are inconceivable without them, like the utility of the king without his dignity. Is this not the very aim of anthropology?

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