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TWO GREAT BRITISH SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS: SIR JAMES FRAZER AND SIR EDWARD EVANS-PRITCHARD

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SOCIAL anthropology, in the course of this century, has behaved like some shops—Boots the Chemists, W. H. Smith & Son the newsagent and booksellers, for example. It has expanded, diversified, and shifted its alliances and boundaries, so that what it was first known for no longer indicates the range of commodities it stocks. But for what I have to say here it is enough to know that for both Sir James Frazer and Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard, social anthropology was the study of peoples whose ideas, ways of life, and forms of society were more or less remote from those in which they themselves had been brought up. Frazer tried to understand such peoples by applying his imagination to written accounts by others; Evans-Pritchard did so, in the manner of modern anthropology, by going and living among them.

Editors' note: This text has been compiled from two typescript versions, on each of which there are deletions and additions in the author's hand. One version, entitled 'Sir James Frazer and Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard in British Social Anthropology', was prepared for a lecture in 1979 at the University of Frankfurt. That version begins: 'When Professor Kronenberg kindly asked me to speak here, I wanted to say something about Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (E-P, as he was usually called), because Professor Kronenberg and I shared his friendship and his interests, particularly in the Sudan and in Nilotic Studies. But Evans-Pritchard, the most British of British social anthropologists, must be understood in a certain kind of British context; and I therefore chose my broad title, knowing very well that it represents themes far too complex to treat adequately in a mere hour or so.' The footnote and the references have been supplied.

Sir James Frazer was born in 1854 and died in 1941. He was thus already twenty-eight years old when Charles Darwin died, and twenty-nine when Karl Marx died. Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard, who was born in 1902 and died in 1973, was thirty-seven when Sigmund Freud died, and forty-nine when Ludwig Wittgenstein died. These are only a few intellectual markers to the period. The literary and artistic figures whose names are now common knowledge and who were for a time their contemporaries are almost innumerable.

Frazer and Evans-Pritchard, then, are important not only because between them they span the formative period of modern social anthropology: they spanned the period which shaped our intellectual interests today and they had their own parts in shaping them. And this was recognized in their lifetimes. They were loaded with academic honours. They were given knighthoods, two of the first three to be conferred on social anthropologists. (The first had been given to Sir Edward Tylor, known as the father of anthropology in Britain, who had a great influence on both of them.) Such recognition indicates not only respect for academic achievements; it is a mark of approval, in the eyes of a wider world than that of the universities, for contributions to Britain's academic reputation. In its own way, it promotes the interests of the subject. And for Frazer and Evans-Pritchard, to promote the interests of social anthropology was also to promote the interests of distant peoples then often misunderstood, or worse, by powerful foreign governments. Their ways of doing so were indirect and literary, rather than political, but they may have been the more generally persuasive for that.

Some thirty years ago (in 1946), social anthropologists in Britain began to form an association, as a forum for discussion of their subject and as a guardian of its practical and theoretical integrity. At the time, its terms of admission were deliberately exclusive. It was called 'The Association of Social Anthropologists of Great Britain and the Commonwealth' and required that its members (with some few exceptions as foreign corresponding members) should have received most of their training in the British tradition of social anthropology. Frazer was dead by that time, and in any case in his later years he had little interest in younger followers. Evans-Pritchard was a founder member, as was his predecessor as Professor in Oxford, Radcliffe-Brown, who was its first President.

There are very many differences in character, background, and interests between Frazer and Evans-Pritchard; but they also had something in common in special ways which many prominent earlier members of the Association of Social Anthropologists of Great Britain and the Commonwealth did not share. Frazer and Evans-Pritchard were not only British; both also were members by birth and upbringing (whatever their more remote ancestry) of the comparatively comfortably off, privately educated, and socially influential British middle classes, from which, along with some of the aristocracy, came what others called 'The Establishment'. From this class came members of the government, of the professions, the home and foreign service, the established church, and much of the then smaller, but socially more important, fellowship of the older universities. Evans-Pritchard writes of 'The Establishment' mockingly: 'The "Establishment", as we have now

learnt to call them, the few cultured, well-connected, influential and rich who really understand affairs and can control them with urbanity from behind the scenes. (I am not sure who they are now, though it appears that the Warden of my college is an *ex-officio* member)' (Evans-Pritchard 1960a: 113). Mocking he may be, but the passage does not suggest that this was a circle from which he himself was quite excluded. Frazer, who was brought up in the less clearly stratified, more egalitarian society of Scotland, was in a rather different position from Evans-Pritchard (educated entirely at Winchester and Oxford) in relation to the British middle classes; nevertheless, they were both fully accepted as belonging by birth and upbringing to those classes, as many of their contemporaries in British social anthropology were not.

It has often been suggested that among the reasons for choosing anthropology as a career has been the social anthropologist's sense of alienation from his own society, of dissatisfaction with its dominant assumptions and values, of not entirely 'belonging'. In this regard, let us briefly consider the differences between Frazer and Evans-Pritchard on the one hand, and their two outstanding contemporaries, Tylor and Malinowski, on the other. Frazer and Evans-Pritchard proceeded from what were called 'good schools' to Cambridge and Oxford respectively, where they both became Fellows of two of the richest and most powerful colleges: Frazer at Trinity College, Cambridge, Evans-Pritchard at All Souls, Oxford. Tylor, brought up a Quaker, could not attend a school where attendance at chapel was compulsory (as it was at 'good schools'), and he was debarred by university regulations from ever being a student at Oxford. Though not poor, he had for a time worked as a clerk in the family's brass foundry, and when he eventually taught social anthropology in Oxford well-entrenched academic interests put many difficulties in his way. Malinowski was Polish, and though his social standing in his own country may have been high, he made his reputation in the then politically radical atmosphere of the London School of Economics and Political Science. Some of those he had influenced in London proceeded to posts in Oxford and Cambridge, but he himself had little contact with the older universities. In their world (perhaps in Oxford more particularly) he was accepted with strong if polite reservations, as a clever, exhibitionistic, controversial, iconoclastic, and by their standards somehow ungentlemanly, foreigner.

If then (as I think is partly true) social anthropology attracted people with some sense of not fully belonging to the dominant order of the society in which they lived, for Tylor and Malinowski—and many others—that partial alienation had an objective and even legal basis. They actually were not quite as equal as other higher British academics of comparable distinction. As a Quaker too, Tylor was in principle a pacifist, and as an alien Malinowski was allowed to go and study the Trobriand Islanders as an alternative to internment during the 1914–18 war. Personal reaction to such a situation is of course a matter of character and temperament; but I am inclined to think that in some social anthropologists it produced a certain social radicalism, different in kind from the social criticism of Frazer and Evans-Pritchard. Certainly Quakers played a part in the earlier days of

the subject out of all proportion to their numbers, as later did Jews and persons not wholly of British extraction; and some of its most determined and hostile opponents (as well as a few supporters) were the spokesmen of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the strongly established Church of England. The elders of the Church of Scotland drove the brilliant Semitic scholar, William Robertson Smith (to whom Frazer dedicated *The Golden Bough*), from his professorship in Aberdeen for heresy; and the Anglican theologians in Oxford more particularly put obstructions in Tylor's way. Frazer and Evans-Pritchard when young were members of these established Churches, and though they both changed their positions *vis-à-vis* them as they grew up, they still partly in a way belonged to them.

Evans-Pritchard, brought up in the Church of England, always retained a sympathetic feeling towards some features of it. He knew many of its hymns by heart (and later in life would sometimes sing snatches of them rather embarrassingly in random social contexts) and he was well-instructed in the Authorized Version of the Bible. Frazer was brought up in a devout Presbyterian household, and remembered the pious atmosphere of his childhood with affection and respect, even when later (and it would seem with some regret) he lost his faith. His prose is filled with echoes of the Authorized Version (which also influenced Evans-Pritchard's literary style), and he edited an anthology of passages from it (Frazer 1895). While not concealing his ultimate agnosticism, Frazer continued to attend church services all his life, and (like Evans-Pritchard) showed respect for religious ceremonial. (Lady Frazer once refused to relinquish their place in the Chapel of the Inner Temple to King George V and his courtiers.) This religious conformism of Frazer's seems to have been curiously underestimated or misunderstood by Evans-Pritchard himself, who tended to represent Frazer as a confirmed atheist, deliberately attempting to undermine revealed religion by showing that Christian practices and beliefs were paralleled in many totally non-Christian cultures. In fact, Frazer's writings never impeded his career, and they made a strong appeal to the more liberal and adventurous of the clergy. Evans-Pritchard, though to some extent temperamentally an anarchist, even a nihilist, and in youth holding views radical for his time, became a Catholic; and though this had in my opinion much less effect on his social anthropological work than some have thought, it certainly distinguished him (he represented himself in later life as a traditionalist) from almost all his contemporaries, for some of whom social anthropology itself was a faith and a way of life.

Religiously and socially, then, both Frazer and Evans-Pritchard belonged to the influential established order of the British society of their time, and this inevitably had some effect upon their anthropological outlook and interests. They were certainly critical of aspects of the social world in which they lived, but their criticisms, often oblique, came from a secure position within that world, and were based on standards and values which its other members could accept. Hence they moved with ease and were treated with respect in social circles when social anthropology itself might not have been much esteemed. (Among the many great names subscribing to a bibliography of Frazer's work were the Prime Ministers of

France, Poland, and Italy—the latter being Benito Mussolini; see Besterman 1934: xi–xvii.)

Frazer and Evans-Pritchard also had another British quality which was not so marked in some other prominent social anthropologists of their time: they set a high value on being 'gentlemen'. This is a very difficult term to explain (it is probably now outmoded), but for them it went with a kind of reticence, combined with intellectual and social self-assurance, which made the appearance of any competition seem vulgar. Frazer and Evans-Pritchard, both wishing to be known as basically modest geniuses, preferred not to be personally involved in the acrimonious quarrels which disfigure (or enliven) anthropological journals. They set great store by courtesy, even chivalry. 'Gentlemen' in this sense might be '*scholars*'; but gentlemen were *not* 'intellectuals', and Frazer and Evans-Pritchard belonged to their class and kind in being somewhat suspicious of 'intellectuals'. Indeed, in their social world, 'intellectuals' tended to be regarded as foreign or full of foreign ideas, just as 'gentlemen', on the whole, only included foreigners in special individual circumstances. To say in English 'a foreign gentleman' almost always involves some ironical devaluation of the person. They might have partly subscribed to this view, expressed by an Etonian:

> Now I am afraid that compared to foreign boys the average Eton boy, of my time at any rate, could only be described as ignorant. What is it then that sets the ignorant above the learned and gives them a repose and a dignity, which all the knowledge contained in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* fails to do?...respect for its womankind. (Drage 1890: 17)

Or again:

> It is of the utmost importance that those, who bring up the younger generation of the lower orders, should be before all things gentlemen, and I use the term in the highest sense. What is wanted there, as elsewhere for the young, is not a cram knowledge of all the 'osophies', the 'ologies', and the 'onomies', but a certain ἦθος as Aristotle calls it, a tone and a code of honour such as is obtained here [at Eton]. (ibid.: 25)

A very well-known English scholar once told me that Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard's predecessor as Professor of Social Anthropology in Oxford, though not a scholar, was a gentleman (by some standards this might have to be qualified), and Evans-Pritchard was both, whereas Malinowski, though intellectually brilliant, was a cad. Evans-Pritchard tells how, early in his career, he asked several prominent anthropologists, who had themselves carried out fieldwork research, for advice on how to proceed. Professor Haddon of Cambridge (whom he admired) told him that one should always behave as a gentleman. Seligman, Evans-Pritchard maintained, told him to remember to take his quinine and keep off 'local women'; Malinowski, perhaps typically, told him not to be a bloody fool (Evans-Pritchard

1973a: 1). Again, in his reminiscences, Evans-Pritchard writes about his beginnings in anthropology:

> I began to vary the tedium of the History School [at Oxford] by taking an interest in books like Tylor's *Primitive Culture* and Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.... But there was here a snag. I did not want to become, I was going to say, just an intellectual. I wanted a life of adventure too, and fieldwork seemed to be the solution to combine both. (Evans-Pritchard 1973b: 18)

Here, the words 'I was going to say, just an intellectual' mildly disparage 'intellectuals', while suggesting that they are not intended to do so. We do not have such direct information about Frazer's attitudes, but his literary hero was Addison, whose writing Frazer very closely imitated; and especially in the character of Sir Roger de Coverley, a bluff, sporting English country gentleman, very suspicious of foreign ideas and foreign music, suspicious indeed of 'ideas' in general. We do know that Sigmund Freud, who admired Frazer, but was certainly a foreigner, an intellectual, and a man of ideas, was dismissed by Frazer simply as 'that creature Freud' (see Downie 1970: 21); and he wrote rather dismissively also of Poincaré, Einstein, and others as 'several scientific gentlemen' (see ibid.: 15; quoting Frazer 1926: 12, n.).

I have dwelt a little on these characteristics of Frazer and Evans-Pritchard because they have something to do with what may be interpreted as the insularity of some British social anthropology, and because they partly explain why neither of these great men produced an intellectual movement or expressly approved any school of interpretation. Frazer prided himself on not having done so; and Evans-Pritchard ignored, even despised, the dogmas and debates between the various 'isms'—functionalism, structuralism, Marxism, and so forth—which excited his contemporaries and live on in modern controversies: 'The theoretical conclusions will...be found to be implicit in an exact and detailed description', he wrote (Evans-Pritchard 1973a: 3). He is not really at home in that series of small books, the Fontana Modern Masters (see Douglas 1980), published in England to introduce 'the men who have changed and are changing the life and thought of our age' (Kermode 1970): Camus, Fanon, Guevara, Marcuse, Chomsky, Freud, Lukacs, McLuhan, Wittgenstein—even Lévi-Strauss, for although he respected Lévi-Strauss personally he was no more impressed or influenced by French structuralist thought than by British functionalism.

I have dwelt on the Britishness of Frazer and Evans-Pritchard, but here another very British situation arises: British they were, but English they certainly were not. This distinction is still important to the British who are not English, as for example demands for political devolution in the British Isles demonstrate. Evans-Pritchard was very conscious (indeed sometimes proud) of not being English, of being a Celt. He was part Welsh and part Irish, and would blame 'the English' for those features of British life he disliked. Frazer was a self-conscious and sentimental Scot. They had both accommodated themselves to the English middle class, but with deep reservations. 'Some of my best friends are...', they might have said.

At a gathering held in Frazer's honour at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1927, his response to the speeches included the following:

> The first time I ever invaded England was when I came from my native Glasgow to compete for a scholarship at Trinity. I had never crossed the border before, and I fear I was a very raw Scotchman indeed; I looked on every Englishman, I will not say as my natural enemy, but certainly as a foreigner and a stranger. (Frazer n.d. [1927]: 16).

But he adds in a British gentlemanly way:

> Well, Bannockburn and Flodden are old stories now, but I sometimes think that one reason why Englishmen and Scotchmen are such good friends, is that they had such good fights before they shook hands and decided to fight side by side for the future, as no doubt they will do to the end of the story. (ibid.)

Very strictly speaking indeed, Frazer was not, by some *English* standards, a 'gentleman', since his father—a cultivated man—owned a retail chemist's, and to 'engage in trade' was not by those standards gentlemanly. On the other hand, as Frazer's biographer and long-suffering secretary R. A. Downie wrote, his mother 'came of a family of well-to-do Glasgow merchants, several of whom owned estates near Glasgow. Among her ancestors were descendants both of the Stuarts and of Cromwell, and through her Sir James could claim remote kinship with the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres and with Sir Ian Hamilton' (Downie 1940: 2). The Earl of Crawford in fact made a speech at the gathering in Frazer's honour in 1927, in which he said, of Frazer's having lived fifty years in England, that 'on the whole he has become tolerably well acclimatised, but I suspect that he remains a Scotsman at heart' (Crawford and Balcarres n.d. [1927]: 20).

A sense of belonging to peoples to some extent conquered and colonized by the English, sometimes jokingly patronized by them, informed Frazer's and Evans-Pritchard's attitudes towards the subject peoples of Empire. Indeed, in a lecture entitled 'The Scope of Social Anthropology', Frazer, intending to stir the consciences of his listeners on behalf of what he called 'the lower races', spoke as though the English, not the British, were the conquerors of Empire, regardless of the fact that so many colonial servants were Scottish:

> We owe it to them, we owe it to ourselves, we owe it to posterity, who will require it at our hands, that we should describe them as they were before we found them, before they ever saw the English flag and heard, for good or evil, the English tongue. The voice of England speaks to her subject peoples in other accents than in the thunder of her guns. Peace has its triumphs as well as war: there are nobler trophies than captured flags and cannons. (Frazer 1908: 22; also 1913a: 176)

Here is the criticism of imperialism from within its own assumptions that I mentioned earlier. Similar attitudes are found in Evans-Pritchard. In his lecture 'Religion and the Anthropologists' he vigorously attacks rationalists, positivists, and other ideological enemies of religion as 'crashing bores, smug and full of intellectual conceit' (Evans-Pritchard 1960a: 114). (You will notice again the pejorative use of the word 'intellectual'.) But then he changes his position and takes their side for a time against the representatives of the established order of the English middle classes, 'the long-winded Gladstones' (ibid.) as he calls them (his maternal grandfather was a great supporter of Gladstone):

> I find the whole period [of Queen Victoria and King Edward VII]...exceedingly tedious; its interminable wars against the weak—Zulus, Ashanti, Benin, Afghans, Burmese, Egyptians, Sudanese and Boers—H. M. Stanley, Lord Randolph Churchill in South Africa, the Prince at Baden Baden...and for good measure, though of an earlier vintage, Dr Arnold at Rugby. (ibid.)

Not always just in his censure, he regarded Dr Arnold, the famous headmaster of Rugby School, a nursery of Empire, as representative of the sanctimonious side of British imperialism, which he particularly detested. At a conference on colonial administration in 1938, where the tone was rather high-minded and in places complacent and self-congratulatory, he spoke of the Southern Sudan as he might have spoken of Southern Ireland under the English:

> To understand native feelings we have to bear in mind that the Southern Sudan was conquered by force and is ruled by force, the threat of force, and the memory of force. Natives do not pay taxes nor make roads from a sense of moral obligation, but because they are afraid of retaliation. The moral relations between natives and Government provide the most fundamental of administrative problems, for the natives have to integrate into their social system a political organization that has no moral value for them. (Evans-Pritchard 1938: 76)

In practice, Evans-Pritchard's research was financed by the Sudan government at their invitation, and he was respected by administrators, and on good social terms with most of them, who came from similar backgrounds to his own. He could even be patronizing to some administrators—those whom Major Jarvis (1937: 117–21) humorously teased as 'guaranteed cock angels'—feeling that there was something of the Boy Scout in their devotion to duty, exaggerating their belief in their simple, straightforward principles, their optimism and their muscular Christianity. But in relation to British officials, to missionaries, and certain other expatriate dwellers among the peoples studied by anthropologists, he told his students that if when abroad they could not get on with their own nationals they were unlikely to be able to get on with any others. He had little sympathy with colleagues who, because of political or social idealism, found themselves on bad terms with the government of the territories in which they worked (as Malinowski, Max Gluckman, and Reo Fortune most certainly had). Yet he was on the worst

possible terms with the governor of the province of the Sudan in which he worked, and outspoken when he felt criticism was inevitable. In relation to heavily colonized Kenya and its White settlers, for example, he wrote that 'it was hard to decide who were the more unpleasant, the officials or the settlers, both of whom were so loathed by the Africans that it was difficult for a white anthropologist to gain their confidence' (Evans-Pritchard 1973a: 11). Still again there is a certain ambivalence in his situation. Mr F. D. Corfield, once Governor of Upper Nile Province in the Sudan, who is mentioned in the acknowledgements to Evans-Pritchard's book *The Nuer* as '*amico et condiscipulo meo* [my friend and fellow student]' (Evans-Pritchard 1940: vii), was the author of the official government report on the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, a report which to some, even at that time, seemed to show considerable prejudice and misunderstanding.

I have said enough, I think, to show that since Frazer and Evans-Pritchard were British gentlemen and scholars, a certain intensity of commitment to purely intellectual questions, to a world of ideas and theories, was incompatible with their social upbringing. They distrusted new words and supposedly new concepts, the methodologies, the system-building of those of their colleagues who were most enthusiastic about 'advancing the subject'. Partly, doubtless, this was a temperamental similarity, for though each had abundant self-confidence and self-assurance, as I have said, they both wished to appear as intellectually modest. In later life, when Evans-Pritchard had developed an exaggerated hostility to his predecessor Radcliffe-Brown (with whom he had seemed to be on friendly terms) he wrote of him: 'Personally and in private urbane, he was inclined when talking to colleagues to combine arrogance with vanity. This can be done at Oxford, but only in the Oxford manner' (Evans-Pritchard 1973b: 22–3). You will note here the sense of belonging to the established order to which I earlier referred; Radcliffe-Brown was a Cambridge man, and not a public schoolboy. Also Frazer's and Evans-Pritchard's education and upbringing inclined them to prefer a literary and historical approach to social anthropology, even sometimes a personal preference for imagination rather than for what they regarded as bloodless analysis. But at the same time, both were committed to 'scientific' procedures and ambitions, appearing to be so sometimes against their will, and taking no pleasure in the idea of reducing the living social world to patterns, laws, structures, statistics, and so on. They seem to have felt that the overriding importance of truth required that they should be 'scientists' in spite of themselves, but they had none of the evangelical optimism for a scientific future—for a time when we should be able to reduce the rich variety of social forms to a few classes of phenomena explicable by general laws and under sociological control—which inspired some of their colleagues. What J. B. Vickery observed about Frazer in his book, *The Literary Impact of the Golden Bough*, would be equally true of Evans-Pritchard, and I can think of no other British social anthropologist of their generations of whom it could so certainly be said:

> the intellectual tradition that shaped Frazer encompassed two chief strains, one looking essentially to the future, the other to the past. The former was the source

> of major advances in science, radical attitudes in politics, and positivistic philosophical principles. The latter, on the other hand, subsumed political conservatives, religious traditionalists, and historical antiquarians. Though diametrically opposed in beliefs and assumptions, the two nevertheless were not so violently hostile as they frequently were in Europe proper. This was largely because of a firmly ingrained moral attitude common to both, which cut across intellectual lines. (Vickery 1973: 6)

Both were, again, conservative in literary taste. Their sympathies and knowledge were confined on the whole to the established classics, and their taste in literature was basically that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain. They had little understanding of, or liking for, modern literature or modern literary criticism. Vickery's book shows in astonishing detail how widely, on the other hand, modern authors and literary radicals made use of Frazer's writings. Evans-Pritchard does not attempt to deal with the vast themes of *The Golden Bough* which attracted poets and novelists to Frazer's writings; but by an irony that Evans-Pritchard himself enjoyed, his accounts of the thought of the Nuer and the Azande found their way into the discussions of modern philosophers for whose work he had little sympathy (see, for example, Polanyi 1958 and Winch 1964). Frazer wrote and published a small quantity of verse of his own, including a poem, 'June in Cambridge', expressing his feeling of being an exile from Scotland (see Frazer 1927: 439), of which these are the fourth and fifth stanzas:

> I shall not feel the breezes,
> I may not smell the sea
> That breaks to-day in Scotland
> On shores how dear to me!
>
> I'm far away, dear Scotland,
> A prisoner in the halls
> Where sluggish Cam steals silent
> By ancient English walls.

But with characteristic ambivalence, he also wrote about the supreme happiness of being at Trinity College, Cambridge (see, for example, his 'My Old Study'; ibid.: 441–2). There may well have been some difficulties there, though, since if Frazer was a gentleman his dramatic French wife was certainly not, in the English sense, a lady, and she made no secret of her hostility to the constriction, as she thought it, of Cambridge academic life.

Evans-Pritchard also wrote fragments of verse, and published some few translations (see, for example, Evans-Pritchard 1946, 1949). In later life he claimed that he would really have wished to be a poet or a novelist, and that a good novelist taught one more about human nature and society than any anthropologist. He took much more interest in developing the Oxford Library of African Literature, of

which he was an editor, than in the writings of any of his anthropological contemporaries.

Their literary and historical cast of mind, combined, it is not too fanciful to say, with the poetic temperament of the Celts and the Gaels, introduces a certain nostalgia, even pessimism, into their writings. In the first volume of his *The Belief in Immortality*, for example, Frazer appears to regret the replacing of the colourful errors of the past, with the cold scientific truths of the present:

> From one department of nature after another the gods are reluctantly or contemptuously dismissed and their provinces committed to the care of certain abstract ideas of ethers, atoms, molecules, and so forth, which, though just as imperceptible to human senses as their divine predecessors, are judged by prevailing opinion to discharge their duties with greater regularity and despatch, and are accordingly firmly installed on the vacant thrones amid the general applause of the more enlightened portion of mankind. Thus instead of being peopled with a noisy bustling crowd of full-blooded and picturesque deities, clothed in the graceful form and animated with the warm passions of humanity, the universe outside the narrow circle of our consciousness is now conceived as absolutely silent, colourless, and deserted. (Frazer 1913b: 20)

Evans-Pritchard, who earlier was for a time a leading exponent of the strictly scientific standing of social anthropology, and always insisted on the need for developing 'theory', shows comparable sense of loss:

> It may be here that I should make a protest about anthropologists' books about peoples. A certain degree of abstraction is of course required, otherwise we could get nowhere, but is it really necessary to just make a book out of human beings? I find the usual account of field-research so boring as often to be unreadable—kinship systems, political systems, ritual systems, every sort of system, structure and function, but little flesh and blood. One seldom gets the impression that the anthropologist felt at one with the people about whom he writes. If this is romanticism and sentimentality I accept those terms. (Evans-Pritchard 1973a: 12)

The criticism is of course exaggerated; and Evans-Pritchard disliked the kind of anthropological writing which exploits the personality, exotic experience, feelings, and excogitations of the writer himself.

The often ambivalent attitude of Frazer and Evans-Pritchard to the attempt to introduce procedures of the natural sciences into the social sciences thus sets them apart from some of their best-known contemporaries. Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski in England, Durkheim and his followers in France, were tireless campaigners for the scientific status of the study of society— 'a natural science of society' was what Radcliffe-Brown envisaged—and although enthusiasm for quite that approach has waned, some anthropologists in Britain today are still closer to forming a science of society than to the historical and humanistic approach which Frazer, and

Evans-Pritchard later on, desiderated. It is not surprising that Frazer probably still has more appeal for the general reader than any other anthropologist. Nevertheless, social anthropology in Britain has come somewhat nearer to history, literature, and philosophy than some of the founders of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth in 1946 would at that time have wished, and it is strange to remember now the shocked reactions of many of his contemporaries to Evans-Pritchard's public statements that social anthropology never could be a kind of natural science of society, but was a humanistic study, a kind of historiography (see, for example, Evans-Pritchard 1950, 1961).

I have said enough, I think, to suggest that Frazer and Evans-Pritchard, though typically British, were not in some ways typical of British social anthropologists as represented in their professional association. I have also suggested that though they had much in common they were also, intellectually, very different. I now turn, finally and briefly, to a great difference between them over a major interest they both shared—their interest in the problem (for it seemed a problem to educated Europeans of Frazer's time) of 'primitive mentality'. Evans-Pritchard's reaction to Frazer's interpretations, which had seemed convincing to many, is an important part of the history of British social anthropology. Today's British social anthropologists do not find 'primitive mentality' a problem, or at least the same kind of problem; and when giving their exegeses of systems of thought they may now refer explicitly more to the French structuralists than to either Frazer or Evans-Pritchard. Nevertheless, the kind of debate which I now partly summarize lies in the background of much of their writing.

I have suggested that Frazer and Evans-Pritchard both wanted to live with the assumptions of their own class and kind, and yet to free themselves from them sufficiently for them to be able to understand the assumptions of others. What Frazer wrote in that part of *The Golden Bough* entitled 'The Dying God' might equally well have been written by Evans-Pritchard, except for the typically Frazerian prose:

> We should commit a grievous error were we to judge all men's love of life by our own, and to assume that others cannot hold cheap what we count so dear. We shall never understand the long course of human history if we persist in measuring mankind in all ages and in all countries by the standard, perhaps excellent but certainly narrow, of the modern English middle class with their love of material comfort and 'their passionate, absorbing, almost bloodthirsty clinging to life'. That class, of which I may say, in the words of Matthew Arnold, that I am myself a feeble unit, doubtless possesses many estimable qualities, but among them can hardly be reckoned the rare and delicate gift of historical imagination, the power of entering into the thoughts and feelings of men of other ages and countries, of conceiving that they may regulate their life by principles which do not square with ours, and may throw it away for objects which to us might seem ridiculously inadequate. (Frazer 1911a: 146)

It is this kind of criticism of, but accommodation to, the English middle class which, in part, made both Frazer and Evans-Pritchard into the kind of social anthropologists they were. For Frazer to speak of himself here as a member of the 'English' middle class is a matter, I think, of politeness: he clearly does not identify with it. Frazer aimed to do what all social anthropologists have wished to do since, that is, to enter into ways of thinking and living in some ways radically different from those which most people of his kind took for granted. But Frazer was not able to do so convincingly, partly because he neither knew the languages nor lived in the circumstances of those 'savages', as he called them, so he turned to introspection. It could only be done through fieldwork in the native language, a requisite which of course Malinowski probably first established in British social anthropology, which was proved invaluable by Evans-Pritchard and his contemporaries, and which made possible Evans-Pritchard's critique of earlier attempts to interpret 'primitive thought'.

Evans-Pritchard's own writings on Frazer and Lévy-Bruhl are concerned, like those of Frazer himself, with what might be called 'the problem of rationality', of 'our' rationality and 'theirs'. In view of some of what I have already said, it is notable that Evans-Pritchard calls his essay criticizing Frazer 'The Intellectualist (English) Interpretation of Magic' (Evans-Pritchard 1973c; first published as Evans-Pritchard 1933). His major objection to Frazer's whole scheme of interpretation is that Frazer regards the magical thought and behaviour of his 'primitive' man as analogous to, and a very defective form of, the scientific thought and behaviour of educated Victorians like himself. By those standards, the savage is always trying to reason about cause and effect, but is too ignorant or infantile to reason correctly or to recognize false premises. Magic then, in Frazer's own words, becomes 'a spurious system of natural law as well as a fallacious guide of conduct; it is a false science as well as an abortive art' (Frazer 1911b: 53). Evans-Pritchard on the other hand maintains that 'the analogy which he [Frazer] draws between science and magic is unintelligible. He says that science and magic both visualize a uniform nature subject to invariable laws and that the scientist and the magician have a like psychological approach to nature' (Evans-Pritchard 1973c: 136). On the contrary, says Evans-Pritchard, 'it is clear from accounts of savages that they have no conception of nature as a system organized by laws and in any case the utilisation of magic to influence the course of nature is surely in direct opposition to the scientist's conception of the universe' (ibid.). (It is a point made by Durkheim when criticizing Tylor.[1]) And he adds, with that sharp penetration

1. *Editors' note:* It is unclear if Lienhardt had in mind here any particular passage from Durkheim's writings. He elsewhere refers to Durkheim's rejection of Tylor's 'individualistic and intellectualist interpretations of symbolic activity—his idea, for example, that primitive man arrived at religious belief by faulty reasoning from effect to cause', but again without making specific references to Durkheim's writings (see Lienhardt 1969: 89). Durkheim's criticisms of Tylor are to be found in the pages of the *Elementary Forms* (see, for example, Durkheim 1976: 49ff., 55ff.).

to the root of the matter characteristic of his best writing, 'You cannot both believe in natural law and that you can delay the sun by placing a stone in the fork of a tree. If there are any regularities and uniformities of thought they are in the workings of magic and not of nature' (ibid.). What Frazer has entirely missed out, Evans-Pritchard observes, is the specific *ritual* context of magical thought and behaviour. Frazer explained magical thought and behaviour by mistaken associations of ideas, false 'laws', one of which he called 'The Law of Contact or Contagion', the other 'The Law of Similarity'. From the first 'the magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it: from the second he infers that whatever he does to a material object will equally affect the person with whom the object was once in contact, whether it formed part of his body or not' (Frazer 1911b: 52). But Evans-Pritchard (1973c: 140) rightly points out that 'these associations are situational associations' and 'the association comes into being by the performance of a rite' (ibid.). Thus, to take the common example of placing a stone in the fork of a tree with the intention of delaying the setting of the sun: Frazer's 'savages', no more than Frazer himself, do not believe that all stones in themselves can influence the setting of the sun; that would be absurd, and Frazer's way of representing their thoughts does, in the eyes of educated Europeans, make it seem absurd.

Evans-Pritchard on the other hand says 'man endows a particular stone with a ritual quality by using it in a rite and for the duration of the rite' (ibid.). Similarly, with another common practice, the throwing of water in the air with the intention of producing rain, no 'savage' supposes that whenever he throws water into the air it will produce rain. 'He only thinks this', Evans-Pritchard says,

> when he throws water into the air during the performance of a rite to produce rain. Hence there is no mistaken association of ideas. The association between a certain quality in one thing and the same quality in another thing is a correct and universal association. It does not violate the laws of logic for it is a psychological process altogether outside their sphere. (ibid.: 140–41)

What he believes, then, is that rites can produce results (as have many educated Europeans), and the mimetic elements are simply 'the manner in which the purpose of the rite is expressed' (ibid.: 141). Somewhat paradoxically, Evans-Pritchard, by insisting that magical rites and beliefs are not intended to be 'rational', in the sense that empirical science is rational, asserts the rationality of the performers themselves. Frazer, by interpreting them as rational, but misguided, ignorant, and misinformed attempts at pseudo-scientific control of the world, makes the performers appear irrational, in that they consistently fail to realize that their procedures do not produce the results they intend. Says Frazer (1911a: 269), 'after all, magical ceremonies are nothing but experiments which have failed, and which continue to be repeated merely because the operator is unaware of their failure'.

It is not of course only the conducting of original field-research which enabled Evans-Pritchard to question the Frazerian interpretations of primitive religion and magic which had satisfied most anthropologists in Britain until 1920 or so, and

which, I think, satisfy most of the general British public today. Evans-Pritchard also had a superior sensitivity and intelligence, a far stronger real sense of the ambiguities and ambivalences of human experience, and more personal knowledge of them. Frazer did indeed try to put himself in the position of his theoretical savage, and had no reason to doubt his ability to do so, for he received wide adulation for it. 'More than once it has happened', writes his biographer Downie, 'when Sir James has been in conversation with Government Residents home from far-distant districts, or with missionaries from Central Africa, that these men, astonished by his insight, have exclaimed: "Why, you know my blacks better than I know them after twenty years' residence among them!"' (Downie 1940: 108).

This may well be true, but it demonstrates the limited understanding of those who said it, rather than the insight of Frazer. Evans-Pritchard's writings place no such distance between the anthropological observer and the peoples he observes. Like Collingwood, the historian and philosopher who first saw the relevance of Evans-Pritchard's studies to those of historians and others (see Collingwood 1938: 8), he saw his task as the recreation of the thought of others in the context of his own, very different, thought. What this involves is indeed a certain marginality, best expressed in Evans-Pritchard's own words:

> One enters into another culture and withdraws from it at the same time. One cannot really become a Zande or a Nuer or a Bedouin Arab, and the best compliment one can pay them is to remain apart from them in essentials. In any case one always remains oneself, inwardly a member of one's own society and a sojourner in a strange land. Perhaps it would be better to say that one lives in two different worlds of thought at the same time, in categories and concepts and values which often cannot easily be reconciled. One becomes, at least temporarily, a sort of double marginal man, alienated from both worlds. (Evans-Pritchard 1973a: 3–4)

None of Frazer's writing shows that he was capable of this kind of imaginative alienation, that he ever knew what it was like to act and think as though one believed something which one also knew one disbelieved. Evans-Pritchard was the kind of sceptical believer who became a great anthropologist by doing so. Frazer's failing was that his way of reconciling his savages' way of thinking with his own was all too easy, and it may be that this is why his interpretations have been so widely satisfying to general readers—they require from them the minimum of imaginative and intellectual effort.

The relationship between Frazer's ideas and Evans-Pritchard's on the subject of 'primitive mentality' has had a profound effect on the thought of British social anthropologists, and finally in discussing it I turn to the attitudes of both of them to the best-known writer on that subject of their time, the writer indeed who established the term 'primitive mentality', Lucien Lévy-Bruhl.

Frazer reviewed the translation of Lévy-Bruhl's *Primitive Mentality* in 1923, before Evans-Pritchard had appeared on the anthropological scene but when he was beginning to read Tylor and Frazer. So when Evans-Pritchard was lecturing on Lévy-Bruhl in Cairo in the early 1930s, he may well have read that unsigned

review in the *Times Literary Supplement* published ten years earlier (Frazer 1923), though he may of course have come across it when it was published as part of a collection of Frazer's occasional writings in 1931 (Frazer 1931). If so, he seems not to have taken account of it.

Evans-Pritchard's work on Lévy-Bruhl is a long and rather tortuous essay. His interest was aroused because he was at that time working on his Azande material for the book *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, and Lévy-Bruhl's work had clearly suggested many ideas to him, some of them in plain contradiction of Lévy-Bruhl's own thesis. Frazer's writing on the subject, on the other hand, is a fairly brief review of one book and he had no research experience of his own against which to measure Lévy-Bruhl's theories. Nevertheless, there is enough in the review to enable us to compare Frazer's and Evans-Pritchard's views.

Lévy-Bruhl maintained that primitive mentality was quite different from civilized mentality, in that it was what he called 'prelogical'—that is, it did not, and did not attempt to, follow the logical procedures of civilized thought. It was mystically orientated, and conceived of the constant participation, at some mystical level, of phenomena in each other, phenomena which civilized thought kept distinct. So, for example, in primitive thought, a person has a mystical bond with his shadow, or with an animal which is his clan's totem. Further, the thought of primitive peoples was circumscribed by what Lévy-Bruhl calls their 'collective representations'—that is, those categories of thought and fundamental assumptions, found, we should now say, in all societies, which are so deeply ingrained in the mentality of the people that there would be, as it were, no intellectual position from which they could be questioned.

The idea of 'collective representations' has been one of the most illuminating contributions of Lévy-Bruhl's in particular, and of the French school of the Année Sociologique in general. Evans-Pritchard singles this out and develops it; Frazer does not grasp its importance, thereby showing the lack of attention to the social conditioning of thought for which Evans-Pritchard criticized him. But Frazer is on the whole sympathetic towards Lévy-Bruhl, more so than many of the British social anthropologists of that time. (Malinowski, for example, gives a very crude summary of Lévy-Bruhl's ideas in order to dismiss them; see Malinowski 1948 [1925]: 25 ff.) It is notable therefore that both Frazer and Evans-Pritchard were receptive to Lévy-Bruhl, and indeed to the thought of the French school in general, at times when such work had made little impression on British social anthropology. Evans-Pritchard, indeed, promoted a series of translations from the French, from which a great deal of subsequent British anthropological writing has been derivative (see, for example, Evans-Pritchard 1960b, 1964).

Frazer, of course, accepts up to a point the stereotypes about 'savages' of his time:

> No doubt the savage in general is much less capable than the civilized man of reasoning on abstract questions; but the cause is not so much a defect in his logical apparatus as an incapacity of forming ideas that involve a high degree of abstraction. In that, as in many other respects, the savage adult is on an intellectual level

> with the civilized child; the analogy between the two should never be forgotten. (Frazer 1923; also 1931: 417)

Evans-Pritchard would have regarded this as an indication that Frazer had misinterpreted the kind of problem which Lévy-Bruhl had set himself, and indeed it comes from the intellectual evolutionism which Evans-Pritchard himself did as much as anyone to discredit. In other ways, however, the criticisms of Lévy-Bruhl made by Frazer in 1923 and by Evans-Pritchard in 1933 have a basic similarity which, I would suggest, relates to some of the qualities they shared which I referred to earlier. Both of them saw clearly that Lévy-Bruhl's writing raised what was to become one of the central implicit questions of later British anthropological writing—the question of who 'we' are, and who 'they' are, when contrasts between 'our' way of thinking and 'their' way of thinking are made. Frazer and Evans-Pritchard were both very well aware that the thought of educated middle-class England did not represent the thought of all English people, still less of the Scots and Welsh; and they both perceived that Lévy-Bruhl, who wrote as though he thought that only educated Europeans represented 'civilization', had appeared to blind himself to very obvious objections to his sharp dichotomy between 'primitive' and 'civilized' mentality. Here again the observations of Frazer are very similar to those of Evans-Pritchard: 'Who are the "we" with whom anthropologists compare and contrast "savages"?', they ask. For example, one of Lévy-Bruhl's theses is that the logical laws of contradiction are ignored by savages; but so they are, say Frazer and Evans-Pritchard, amongst most of 'us'. To quote Frazer:

> And in regard to the law of contradiction, is it not directly violated by some of the highest doctrines of Christian, and especially Catholic, theology, which are yet accepted implicitly as true by millions of educated and intelligent men and women? Judged by this test, Pascal and Newton were 'primitives'. Has not Pascal said that '*Quand la parole de Dieu, qui est véritable, est fausse littéralle-ment, elle est vraie spirituellement*'? And is not this a perfect example of the method in which, according to Professor Lévy-Bruhl, the savage contrives to reconcile contradictory notions by virtue of what our author calls 'the law of participation'? Hegel himself spent a world of energy in reconciling contradictions in 'a higher unity'. Are we, therefore, to number Hegel also among the primitives? (Frazer 1923; also 1931: 416–17)

I could give more examples of similarities in the criticisms of Lévy-Bruhl made by Frazer and Evans-Pritchard, but they come basically from one similarity, a similarity in the kind of 'Britishness' that Frazer and Evans-Pritchard represent.

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