

Notes on P&B Chapter 13 (The Sacred)

I.) **Sacred/Profane**, early French founder of sociology who steeped himself in early ethnographic reports, **Emile Durkheim**; society worships itself

A.) **Sacred**=non-ordinary reality in which material technology can no longer determine outcomes.

1.) Mainly because these are realms of **Ultimate Reality & Meaning**

a.) Injury (there is no such thing as "chance" in traditional society)

b.) Illness (not "sickness")

c.) Death

d.) Fate & Destiny (if applicable)

2.) The origin of which is set forth in **myth** ("a sacred story believed to be true in non-commutable space-time)

B.) **Profane**=ordinary reality in which material technology can help determine outcomes

II.) Interaction with the Sacred

A.) **Religion**=belief in supernatural beings, ethereally-embodied & with **will** (3 elements=[1.] supernatural powers, [2.] myths of their origin, and [3.] rituals to influence them\*)

1.) Approached via **supplication**, the petitioner asks a supernatural to reverse the laws of ordinary reality on his/her behalf, putting themselves into the position of a social **inferior** addressing a social **superior**, as in the child-to-parent relationship, with reverence.

2.) In a **mirror image** to social reality, **inverted** yet **isomorphic**.

a.) "Inverted" in that the supernatural mirrors the shape of ordinary animals, birds, plants, etc.

(if an egalitarian band or tribal society),

or ordinary people (if a chiefdom or state society), a view expressed by the modern

British structuralist ethnologist Sir

Edmund Leach, save:

i.) of altered scale (bigger=giant/midget)

ii.) more powerful (omnipotent)

iii.) wiser (omniscient) or

iv.) all-appearing (omnipresent) and

v.) ever-lasting (eternal) or exceptionally long-lived

vi.) of miraculous conception (divine birth)

- vii.) & miraculous precosity (fast-developing)
- viii.) & miraculous acts (miracles)
- b.) "Mirrored" in the sense of the modern American ethnologist Guy Swanson, that these beings will be organized as the society in which the believer is lodged:
  - iii.) Egalitarian band or tribal society up to the "Big Man" level will have non-hierarchically-organized welter of many "spirits", like ghosts, many of them animal-the "lateral" view.
  - iv.) Stratified chiefdom and state-level societies will have hierarchically-organized and functionally-differentiated supernatural beings, many of them with human attributes, like "angels", of Gods. **Polytheism** (many "departmental" gods, a supernatural bureaucracy in "kingdoms").
  - v.) Stratified Empire, as the modern English historiographer Alfred Toynbee, noted, as ethnically-heterogenous empires broke up (the Roman, the Mauryan), **monotheistic** world religions formed, like Christianity & Buddhism.

- 3.) Producing what the French structuralist ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has called "**the Savage Mind**"
  - a.) accept certain truths and that is all one needs to know
  - b.) a **closed** world view, not susceptible to **invalidation**
  - c.) as distinct from the modern **open** scientific world-view

#### B.) Forms of Religion:

- 1.) **Animism**=Humankind's first religion; E.B. Tylor-19th century definition as a "belief in spiritual beings", the total spirituality of the universe.
- 2.) **Theism**=belief in god[s]
  - a.) **Polytheism**=belief in many gods
  - b.) **Monotheism**=belief in one god

- i.) Otiose deities (1st Cause, egalitarian)

ii.) Interfering deities (reverse natural law on behalf of petitioners=supplicants, ranked & stratified

societies)

C.) Origin of Religion (according to E.B. Tylor, it is probably derived from dreams & visions)

1.) Logical deduction: humans have 2 parts:

a.) Body, the "house"

b.) Soul, the "spirit" that goes wandering

2.) Since animals also dream, they too have spirits

3.) Since they also grow, move & develop, other things that show dynamism such as clouds, rivers & even mountains must also have souls & "will"=**nature worship**

D.) Explains illness & death

1.) "Illness" is different from Western "sickness" & symptomology

a.) Illness is temporary soul loss

i.) usually by **kidnapping** by animal spirit, the shaman must travel & retrieve it

ii.) or an enemy shaman

b.) or soul intrusion (contamination)

ii.) X-Ray vision coupled with the "sucking cure" to extract the contaminant

2.) "Death" becomes permanent soul loss

3.) Fate of the Soul (single or multiple souls)

E.) Myths="sacred stories believed to be true"

1.) In non-commutable space/time ("long ago & far away") that explain **origin**

a.) as in Dani myth of a race between a bird and a snake that could shed its skin & live forever; the bird won, so people, like birds, die

b.) or in the Imbi myth of the battling mountains, a "legend", one element "real", like Dracula

c.) "folktale", a "just-so" story, humorous, animals

2.) Kinds of myths determine cultural attitudes, i.e., biblical myth from Genesis (1:26-30); God gave humans "dominion" over nature, telling us to "subdue" earth & living creatures

a.) A double-edged sword: leads to objectification of nature=science & technology, why we are successful

b.) but also leads to ecological disaster

c.) versus "praying to the trees" & "Master of Animals"

3.) "Mythic Empiricism" (tautological logic)

- a.) Signs (Mircea Eliade, "herophany")
  - b.) Miracles (reversals of natural law)
- F.) Magic (or 19th century British anthropologist, R.R. Marrett's **Animatism**, from the Polynesian word **Mana**), from a depersonalized supernatural force ("The Force") that explains "efficacy", yet has no "will"
- 1.) "Supernatural technology" according to the early modern Polish ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski, the Trobriand Islands: lagoon versus open-ocean fishing
  - 2.) Kinds of magic (1890, Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough, a very influential set of books (still in print as a single condensed volume)
    - a.) The "imitative principle"=>sympathetic magic (like produces like)
    - b.) The "contagious principle"=>contagious magic (once in contact, always in contact)
- G.) Sacred performances (behavior):
- 1.) Rituals (primary audience are supernaturals)
    - a.) always **stereotyped** in elements & syntax
    - b.) "**parcelled-out**"
    - c.) May be done to obtain help or to harm others; there is no concept of **chance** (of collapsing graneries)
    - d.) Types:
      - i.) Divination (to foretell future)
      - ii.) Calendrical (yearly round, Roy Rappaport & "ritual regulation"; religion has 2 kinds of statements: empirical & non-empirical, if 1st works will believe 2nd)
      - iii.) Crisis
  - 2.) Ceremonies (primary audience are humans; like a wedding)
  - 3.) Sacred Places
    - a.) Oracle sites, like Chavín de Huantar in ancient Peru (1000 B.C.), or the Oracle at Delphi in ancient Greece; the foci of "regional cults"
    - b.) Pilgrimage sites, may be like above, to which worshippers travel to pay homage or to request advice or help

c.) Temples, structures built to house idols &/or priests, to pay cult to theistic beings

4.) Sacred Objects

a.) amulet=magically powerful object, usually worn on one's person

b.) fetish=a small object with an indwelling spirit

c.) idol=a large object, often anthropomorphic, of a god or powerful spirit

d.) talisman=a small object of remembrance, often of a dead relative, or of a life experience, worn on the body

5.) Sacred Language (either archaic=unitelligible, Latin) or borrowed

H.) Magico-Religious Specialists:

1.) Shamans (associated with egalitarian band & tribal societies as sole specialist)

a.) Direct contact with the supernatural (each shaman has his own world-view)

b.) Via "altered states of consciousness"

i.) by trance (often produced by "mortification of the flesh"=sleep, food, social contact or sensory deprivation, or musical/dance cues)

ii.) by hallucinogenic drugs (psychotropic)= the Fly Agaric mushroom=Soma of the ancient East

Indian (Aryan) Veddas; peyote of the American

Southwest, virola=ebene of the Yanomamo; yajé

i.e., ayahuasca, LSD-like, of the Amazon

c.) Spirit Helpers/animal doubles="familiar", animal or avian "transformation"

d.) The Shamanic Flight (travels thru the universe)

e.) For curing of "illness" (includes psychosomatic)/"sickness" via massage (like Yanomamö, "sucking cure" (pictured in P&B), or Herbal remedies

f.) A Hierarchy of Shamans:

i.) Humble village herbalist/bone-setter (can be female)

ii.) Village curing shaman (usually male)

iii.) Powerful regional shaman (usually male)

2.) Witches (the "other side" of shamanic curing=bewitchment), the "blowing curse", sorcery

a.) Accusations of witchcraft tend to mark marginal people in society, as a means of social control (Halloween)

b.) Incidence of witchcraft tends to escalate among "pacified"

populations which are no longer allowed to engage in warfare or internal feuding

- 3.) Seers (clairvoyants, foretell the future, see into the past)
  - a.) Ordeal Operators (Old Man David among the Kpelle)
  - b.) Diviners=Prognosticators (tea-leaf readers, tarot card interpreters, palm readers)
- 4.) Priests (associated with chiefdom & state-level societies)
  - a.) Indirect contact with supernaturals by virtue of some ceremony of "ordination", that is, formal education from socially-recognized authorities
  - b.) Defenders of orthodoxy (sacred beliefs or scriptures)
  - c.) Using rational states of consciousness-East India, the bodily discipline of Yoga replaces the use of Soma
  - d.) Priests tend to out-compete shamans (the Salem Witch trials) kill them, relabel them witches or Devil

Worshippers, & "demote" their skills (ventriloquism, sleight-of-hand) to mere entertainment (magicians)

I.) Forms of Religious Organization (cults-our perjorative use is not helpful cross-culturally; not equivalent to "religion", which may have many "cults", tends to be specialized like "curing" or "rain" cults); evolved by American anthropologist Anthony Wallace in the 1960s:

- 1.) Individualistic Cults (i.e., "the vision quest")
- 2.) Shamanistic Cults
- 3.) Communal Cults, still no full-time religious specialists
  - a.) Ancestor cults (associated with linear corporate descent groups, like lineages)
  - b.) Totemism (mythical were-ancestors of clans)
    - i.) Taboos against hunting/eating
    - ii.) Increase rites=to magically increase their numbers so other clans can eat them
    - iii.) Models human culture on nature (Wolf Clan "eats=marries" Deer Clan)
- 4.) Ecclesiastical Cults (full-time occupational specialists, like priests)
  - a.) Strong distinction between priest and layperson
  - b.) tends to become hereditary

5.) Revitalization Movements (in times of rapid culture change=  
culture shock) by:

- a.) exposure to alien people, customs or objects
- b.) foreign domination, like the spread of colonialism
- c.) feelings of "relative deprivation" ("poor" for the first time)
- d.) initiated by **prophets** via **revelations** (vision of a new world)= Messianic Cults
- e.) is often **apocalyptic** (end of times)
  - i.) Cargo cults (pictured in P&B)
  - ii.) Longhouse Religion (Seneca, Handsome Lake, 1800s, preach against alcohol + peaceful coexistence)
  - iii.) Peyotism & the Native American Church-combines Christianity with shamanism among Plains & SW Indians (John Wilson, a Delaware)

