

MARY DOUGLAS

*Purity
and Danger*

AN ANALYSIS
OF THE CONCEPTS OF
POLLUTION AND TABOO



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official titles and assemblies. If central government did not exist, political analysis was held irrelevant. In the 1930s car designers found that they could eliminate the steel frame if they treated the whole car as a single unit. The stresses and strains formerly carried by the frame are now able to be carried by the body of the car itself. At about the same time Evans-Pritchard found that he could make a political analysis of a system in which there were no central organs of government and in which the weight of authority and the strains of political functioning were dispersed through the whole structure of the body politic. So the structural approach was in the air of anthropology before Levi-Strauss was stimulated by structural linguistics to apply it to kinship and mythology. It follows that anyone approaching rituals of pollution nowadays would seek to treat a people's ideas of purity as part of a larger whole.

My other source of inspiration has been my husband. In matters of cleanness his threshold of tolerance is so much lower than my own that he more than anyone else has forced me into taking a stand on the relativity of dirt.

Many people have discussed chapters with me and I am very grateful for their criticism, particularly the Bellarmine Society of Heythrop College, Robin Horton, Father Louis de Sousberghe, Dr. Shifra Strizower, Dr. Cecily de Monchaux, Professor Vic Turner and Dr. David Pole. Some have been kind enough to read drafts of particular chapters and comment on them: Dr. G. A. Wells on Chapter 1, Professor Maurice Freedman on Chapter 4, Dr. Edmund Leach, Dr. Joan Lewis and Professor Ernest Gellner on Chapter 6, Dr. Marvyn Meggitt and Dr. James Woodburn on Chapter 9. I am particularly grateful to Professor S. Stein, Head of the Department of Hebrew Studies in University College for his patient corrections of an early draft of Chapter 3. He has not seen the final version and is not responsible for further mistakes in biblical scholarship which may have crept in. Nor is Professor Daryll Forde who has frequently read early versions of the book, responsible for the final result. I am specially grateful for his criticisms.

This book represents a personal view, controversial and often premature. I hope that the specialists into whose province the argument has flowed will forgive the trespass, because this is one of the subjects which has hitherto suffered from being handled too narrowly within a single discipline.

M.D.

Introduction

The nineteenth century saw in primitive religions two peculiarities which separated them as a block from the great religions of the world. One was that they were inspired by fear, the other that they were inextricably confused with defilement and hygiene. Almost any missionary's or traveller's account of a primitive religion talks about the fear, terror or dread in which its adherents live. The source is traced to beliefs in horrible disasters which overtake those who inadvertently cross some forbidden line or develop some impure condition. And as fear inhibits reason it can be held accountable for other peculiarities in primitive thought, notably the idea of defilement. As Ricoeur sums it up:

*'La souillure elle-même est à peine une
représentation et celle-ci est noyée dans une
peur spécifique qui bouche la réflexion; avec
la souillure nous entrons au règne de la Terreur.'*

(p. 31)

But anthropologists who have ventured further into these primitive cultures find little trace of fear. Evans-Pritchard's study of witchcraft was made among the people who struck him as the most happy and carefree of the Sudan, the Azande. The feelings of an Azande man, on finding that he has been bewitched, are not terror, but hearty indignation as one of us might feel on finding himself the victim of embezzlement.

The Nuer, a deeply religious people, as the same authority points out, regard their God as a familiar friend. Audrey Richards, witnessing the girls' initiation rites of the Bemba,

noted the casual, relaxed attitude of the performers. And so the tale goes on. The anthropologist sets out expecting to see rituals performed with reverence, to say the least. He finds himself in the role of the agnostic sightseer in St. Peter's, shocked at the disrespectful clatter of the adults and the children playing Roman shovehalfpenny on the floor stones. So primitive religious fear, together with the idea that it blocks the functioning of the mind, seems to be a false trail for understanding these religions.

Hygiene, by contrast, turns out to be an excellent route, so long as we can follow it with some self-knowledge. As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. If we shun dirt, it is not because of craven fear, still less dread of holy terror. Nor do our ideas about disease account for the range of our behaviour in cleaning or avoiding dirt. Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment.

I am personally rather tolerant of disorder. But I always remember how unrelaxed I felt in a particular bathroom which was kept spotlessly clean in so far as the removal of grime and grease was concerned. It had been installed in an old house in a space created by the simple expedient of setting a door at each end of a corridor between two staircases. The decor remained unchanged: the engraved portrait of Vinogradoff, the books, the gardening tools, the row of gumboots. It all made good sense as the scene of a back corridor, but as a bathroom – the impression destroyed repose. I, who rarely feel the need to impose an idea of external reality, at least began to understand the activities of more sensitive friends. In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea. There is nothing fearful or unreasoning in our dirt-avoidance: it is a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience. If this is so with our separating, tidying and purifying, we should interpret primitive purification and prophylaxis in the same light.

In this book I have tried to show that rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience. So far from being aberrations from the central project of religion, they are positive

contributions to atonement. By their means, symbolic patterns are worked out and publicly displayed. Within these patterns disparate elements are related and disparate experience is given meaning.

Pollution ideas work in the life of society at two levels, one largely instrumental, one expressive. At the first level, the more obvious one, we find people trying to influence one another's behaviour. Beliefs reinforce social pressures: all the powers of the universe are called in to guarantee an old man's dying wish, a mother's dignity, the rights of the weak and innocent. Political power is usually held precariously and primitive rulers are no exception. So we find their legitimate pretensions backed by beliefs in extraordinary powers emanating from their persons, from the insignia of their office or from words they can utter. Similarly the ideal order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors. These danger-beliefs are as much threats which one man uses to coerce another as dangers which he himself fears to incur by his own lapses from righteousness. They are a strong language of mutual exhortation. At this level the laws of nature are dragged in to sanction the moral code: this kind of disease is caused by adultery, that by incest; this meteorological disaster is the effect of political disloyalty, that the effect of impiety. The whole universe is harnessed to men's attempts to force one another into good citizenship. Thus we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion, as when the glance or touch of an adulterer is held to bring illness to his neighbours or his children.

It is not difficult to see how pollution beliefs can be used in a dialogue of claims and counter-claims to status. But as we examine pollution beliefs we find that the kind of contacts which are thought dangerous also carry a symbolic load. This is a more interesting level at which pollution ideas relate to social life. I believe that some pollutions are used as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order. For example, there are beliefs that each sex is a danger to the other through contact with sexual fluids. According to other beliefs only one sex is endangered by contact with the other, usually males from females, but sometimes the reverse. Such patterns of sexual danger can be seen to express symmetry or hierarchy. It is

Thesis of Book

1.

2.

BEFORE HIV!!

Key: SOCIETAL ORDER is SYMBOLIZED
By ORDER IN SEXUAL BODY.

Purity and Danger

implausible to interpret them as expressing something about the actual relation of the sexes. I suggest that many ideas about sexual dangers are better interpreted as symbols of the relation between parts of society, as mirroring designs of hierarchy or symmetry which apply in the larger social system. What goes for sex pollution also goes for bodily pollution. The two sexes can serve as a model for the collaboration and distinctiveness of social units. So also can the processes of ingestion portray political absorption. Sometimes bodily orifices seem to represent points of entry or exit to social units, or bodily perfection can symbolise an ideal theocracy.

Each primitive culture is a universe to itself. Following Franz Steiner's advice in *Taboo*, I start interpreting rules of uncleanness by placing them in the full context of the range of dangers possible in any given universe. Everything that can happen to a man in the way of disaster should be catalogued according to the active principles involved in the universe of his particular culture. Sometimes words trigger off cataclysms, sometimes acts, sometimes physical conditions. Some dangers are great and others small. We cannot start to compare primitive religions until we know the range of powers and dangers they recognise. Primitive society is an energised structure in the centre of its universe. Powers shoot out from its strong points, powers to prosper and dangerous powers to retaliate against attack. But the society does not exist in a neutral, uncharged vacuum. It is subject to external pressures; that which is not with it, part of it and subject to its laws, is potentially against it. In describing these pressures on boundaries and margins I admit to having made society sound more systematic than it really is. But just such an expressive over-systematising is necessary for interpreting the beliefs in question. For I believe that ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, about and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created. In this sense I am not afraid of the charge of having made the social structure seem over-rigid.

But in another sense I do not wish to suggest that the primitive cultures in which these ideas of contagion flourish are rigid, hide-bound and stagnant. No one knows how old are

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the ideas of purity and impurity in any non-literate culture: to members they must seem timeless and unchanging. But there is every reason to believe that they are sensitive to change. The same impulse to impose order which brings them into existence can be supposed to be continually modifying or enriching them. This is a very important point. For when I argue that the reaction to dirt is continuous with other reactions to ambiguity or anomaly, I am not reviving the nineteenth century hypothesis of fear in another guise. Ideas about contagion can certainly be traced to reaction to anomaly. But they are more than the disquiet of a laboratory rat who suddenly finds one of his familiar exits from the maze is blocked. And they are more than the discomfiture of the aquarium stickleback with an anomalous member of his species. The initial recognition of anomaly leads to anxiety and from there to suppression or avoidance; so far, so good. But we must look for a more energetic organising principle to do justice to the elaborate cosmologies which pollution symbols reveal.

The native of any culture naturally thinks of himself as receiving passively his ideas of power and danger in the universe, discounting any minor modifications he himself may have contributed. In the same way we think of ourselves as passively receiving our native language and discount our responsibility for shifts it undergoes in our life time. The anthropologist falls into the same trap if he thinks of a culture he is studying as a long established pattern of values. In this sense I emphatically deny that a proliferation of ideas about purity and contagion implies a rigid mental outlook or rigid social institutions. The contrary may be true.

It may seem that in a culture which is richly organised by ideas of contagion and purification the individual is in the grip of iron-hard categories of thought which are heavily safeguarded by rules of avoidance and by punishments. It may seem impossible for such a person to shake his own thought free of the protected habit-grooves of his culture. How can he turn round upon his own thought-process and contemplate its limitations? And yet if he cannot do this, how can his religion be compared with the great religions of the world?

The more we know about primitive religions the more clearly it appears that in their symbolic structures there is scope for meditation on the great mysteries of religion and philosophy.

Purity and Danger

Reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death. Wherever ideas of dirt are highly structured their analysis discloses a play upon such profound themes. This is why an understanding of rules of purity is a sound entry to comparative religion. The Pauline antithesis of blood and water, nature and grace, freedom and necessity, or the Old Testament idea of Godhead can be illuminated by Polynesian or Central African treatment of closely related themes.

1

Ritual Uncleaness

Our idea of dirt is compounded of two things, care for hygiene and respect for conventions. The rules of hygiene change, of course, with changes in our state of knowledge. As for the conventional side of dirt-avoidance, these rules can be set aside for the sake of friendship. Hardy's farm labourers commended the shepherd who refused a clean mug for his cider as a 'nice unparticular man':

"A clane cup for the shepherd," said the maltster commandingly.

"No - not at all," said Gabriel, in a reproving tone of considerateness. "I never fuss about dirt in its pure state and when I know what sort it is . . . I wouldn't think of giving such trouble to neighbours in washing up when there's so much work to be done in the world already."

In a more exalted spirit, St Catherine of Sienna, when she felt revulsion from the wounds she was tending, is said to have bitterly reproached herself. Sound hygiene was incompatible with charity, so she deliberately drank of a bowl of pus.

Whether they are rigorously observed or violated, there is nothing in our rules of cleanness to suggest any connection between dirt and sacredness. Therefore it is only mystifying to learn that primitives make little difference between sacredness and uncleanness.

For us sacred things and places are to be protected from defilement. Holiness and impurity are at opposite poles. We would as soon confound hunger with fullness or sleeping with waking. Yet it is supposed to be a mark of primitive religion

"CULTURE": "The public standardized values of a community."

2

Secular Defilement

Comparative religion has always been bedevilled by medical materialism. Some argue that even the most exotic of ancient rites have a sound hygienic basis. Others, though agreeing that primitive ritual has hygiene for its object, take the opposite view of its soundness. For them a great gulf divides our sound ideas of hygiene from the primitive's erroneous fancies. But both these medical approaches to ritual are fruitless because of a failure to confront our own ideas of hygiene and dirt.

On the first approach it is implied that if we only knew all the circumstances we would find the rational basis of primitive ritual amply justified. As an interpretation this line of thought is deliberately prosaic. The importance of incense is not that it symbolises the ascending smoke of sacrifice, but it is a means of making tolerable the smells of unwashed humanity. Jewish and Islamic avoidance of pork is explained as due to the dangers of eating pig in hot climates.

It is true that there can be a marvellous correspondence between the avoidance of contagious disease and ritual avoidance. The washings and separations which serve the one practical purpose may be apt to express religious themes at the same time. So it has been argued that their rule of washing before eating may have given the Jews immunity in plagues. But it is one thing to point out the side benefits of ritual actions, and another thing to be content with using the by-products as a sufficient explanation. Even if some of Moses's dietary rules were hygienically beneficial it is a pity to treat him as an enlightened public health administrator, rather than as a spiritual leader.

Secular Defilement

I quote from a commentary on Mosaic dietary rules, dated 1841:

'It is probable that the chief principle determining the laws of this chapter will be found in the region of hygiene and sanitation. . . . The idea of parasitic and infectious maladies, which has conquered so great a position in modern pathology, appears to have greatly occupied the mind of Moses, and to have dominated all his hygienic rules. He excludes from the Hebrew dietary animals particularly liable to parasites; and as it is in the blood that the germ or spores of infectious diseases circulate, he orders that they must be drained of their blood before serving for food. . . .'

(Kellog)

He goes on to quote evidence that European Jews have a longer expectation of life and immunity in plagues, advantages which he attributes to their dietary restrictions. When he writes of parasites, it is unlikely that Kellog is thinking of the trichiniasis worm, since it was not observed until 1828 and was considered harmless to man until 1860 (Hegner, Root and Augustine, 1924, p. 439).

For a recent expression of the same kind of view read Dr. Ajose's account of the medical value of ancient Nigerian practices (1957). The Yoruba cult of a smallpox deity, for example, requires the patients to be isolated and treated only by a priest, himself recovered from the disease and therefore immune. Furthermore, the Yoruba use the left hand for handling anything dirty:

'... because the right hand is used for eating, and people realise the risk of contamination of food that might result if this distinction were not observed.'

Father Lagrange also subscribed to the same idea:

'Alors l'impureté, nous ne le nions pas, a un caractère religieux, ou du moins touche au surnaturel prétendu; mais, dans sa racine, est-ce autre chose qu'une mesure de préservation sanitaire? L'eau ne remplace-t-elle pas ici les antiseptiques? Et l'esprit redouté n'a-t-il pas fait des siennes en sa nature propre de microbe?' (p. 155)

It may well be that the ancient tradition of the Israelites included the knowledge that pigs are dangerous food for humans.

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Anything is possible. But note that this is not the reason given in Leviticus for the prohibition of pork and evidently the tradition, if it ever existed, was lost. For Maimonides himself, the great twelfth-century prototype of medical materialism, although he could find hygienic reasons for all the other dietary restrictions of Mosaic law, confessed himself baffled by the prohibition on pork, and was driven back to aesthetic explanations, based on the revolting diet of the domestic pig:

'I maintain that the food which is forbidden by the Law is unwholesome. There is nothing among the forbidden kinds of food whose injurious character is doubted, except pork, and fat. But also in these cases the doubt is not justified. For pork contains more moisture than necessary (for human food), and too much of superfluous matter. The principal reason why the Law forbids swine's flesh is to be found in the circumstance that its habits and its food are very dirty and loathsome. . . .'
(p. 370 seq.)

This at least shows that the original basis of the rule concerning pig flesh was not transmitted with the rest of the cultural heritage, even if it had once been recognised.

Pharmacologists are still hard at work on Leviticus XI. To give one example I cite a report by David I. Macht to which Miss Jocelyne Richard has referred me. Macht made muscle extract from swine, dog, hare, coney (equated with guinea-pigs for experimental purposes), and camel, and also from birds of prey and from fishes without fins and scales. He tested the extracts for toxic juices and found them to be toxic. He tested extracts from animals which counted as clean in Leviticus and found them less toxic, but still he reckoned his research proved nothing either way about the medical value of the Mosaic laws.

For another example of medical materialism read Professor Kramer, who lauds a Sumerian tablet from Nippur as the only medical text received from the 3rd millennium B.C.

'The text reveals, though indirectly, a broad acquaintance with quite a number of rather elaborate medical operations and procedures. For example, in several of the prescriptions the instructions were to "purify" the simples before pulverisation, a step which must have required several chemical operations.'

Quite convinced that purifying here does not mean sprinkling with holy water or reciting a spell, he goes on enthusiastically:

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'The Sumerian physician who wrote our tablet did not resort to magic spells and incantations . . . the startling fact remains that our clay document, the oldest "page" of medical text as yet uncovered, is completely free from mystical and irrational elements.'

(1956, pp. 58-9)

So much for medical materialism, a term coined by William James for the tendency to account for religious experience in these terms: for instance, a vision or dream is explained as due to drugs or indigestion. There is no objection to this approach unless it excludes other interpretations. Most primitive peoples are medical materialists in an extended sense, in so far as they tend to justify their ritual actions in terms of aches and pains which would afflict them should the rites be neglected. I shall later show why ritual rules are so often supported with beliefs that specific dangers attend on their breach. By the time I have finished with ritual danger I think no one should be tempted to take such beliefs at face value.

As to the opposite view – that primitive ritual has nothing whatever in common with our ideas of cleanness – this I deplore as equally harmful to the understanding of ritual. On this view our washing, scrubbing, isolating and disinfecting has only a superficial resemblance with ritual purifications. Our practices are solidly based on hygiene; theirs are symbolic: we kill germs, they ward off spirits. This sounds straightforward enough as a contrast. Yet the resemblance between some of their symbolic rites and our hygiene is sometimes uncannily close. For example, Professor Harper summarises the frankly religious context of Havik Brahmin pollution rules. They recognise three degrees of religious purity. The highest is necessary for performing an act of worship; a middle degree is the expected normal condition, and finally there is a state of impurity. Contact with a person in the middle state will cause a person in the highest state to become impure, and contact with anyone in an impure state will make either higher categories impure. The highest state is only gained by a rite of bathing.

Key.

'A daily bath is absolutely essential to a Brahmin, for without it he cannot perform daily worship to his gods. Ideally, Haviks say, they should take three baths a day, one before each meal. But few do this. In practice all Haviks whom I have known rigidly observe the custom of a daily bath, which is

taken before the main meal of the day and before the household gods are worshipped. . . . Havik males, who belong to a relatively wealthy caste and who have a fair amount of leisure time during certain seasons, nevertheless do a great deal of the work required to run their areca nut estates. Every attempt is made to finish work that is considered dirty or ritually defiling – for example, carrying manure to the garden or working with an untouchable servant – before the daily bath that precedes the main meal. If for any reason this work has to be done in the afternoon, another bath should be taken when the man returns home. . . .’ (p. 153)

Note! A distinction is made between cooked and uncooked food as carriers of pollution. Cooked food is liable to pass on pollution, while uncooked food is not. So uncooked foods may be received from or handled by members of any caste – a necessary rule from the practical point of view in a society where the division of labour is correlated with degrees of inherited purity. (See p. 127 in Chapter 7.) Fruit and nuts, as long as they are whole, are not subject to ritual defilement, but once a coconut is broken or a plantain cut, a Havik cannot accept it from a member of a lower caste.

‘The process of eating is potentially polluting, but the manner determines the amount of pollution. Saliva – even one’s own – is extremely defiling. If a Brahmin inadvertently touches his fingers to his lips, he should bathe or at least change his clothes. Also, saliva pollution can be transmitted through some material substances. These two beliefs have led to the practice of drinking water by pouring it into the mouth instead of putting the lips on the edge of the cup, and of smoking cigarettes . . . through the hand so that they never directly touch the lips. (Hookas are virtually unknown in this part of India) . . . Eating of any food – even drinking coffee – should be preceded by washing the hands and feet.’ (p. 156)

Food which can be tossed into the mouth is less liable to convey saliva pollution to the eater than food which is bitten into. A cook may not taste the food she is preparing, as by touching her finger to her lips she would lose the condition of purity required for protecting food from pollution. While eating a person is in the middle state of purity and if by accident he

should touch the server’s hand or spoon, the server becomes impure and should at least change clothes before serving more food. Since pollution is transmitted by sitting in the same row at a meal, when someone of another caste is entertained he is normally seated separately. A Havik in a condition of grave impurity should be fed outside the house, and he is expected himself to remove the leaf-plate he fed from. No one else can touch it without being defiled. The only person who is not defiled by touch and by eating from the leaf of another is the wife who thus, as we have said, expresses her personal relation to her husband. And so the rules multiply. They discriminate in ever finer and finer divisions, prescribing ritual behaviour concerning menstruation, childbirth and death. All bodily emissions, even blood or pus from a wound, are sources of impurity. Water, not paper must be used for washing after defaecating, and this is done only with the left hand, while food may be eaten only with the right hand. To step on animal faeces causes impurity. Contact with leather causes impurity. If leather sandals are worn they should not be touched with the hands, and should be removed and the feet be washed before a temple or house is entered.

Precise regulations give the kinds of indirect contact which may carry pollution. A Havik, working with his untouchable servant in his garden, may become severely defiled by touching a rope or bamboo at the same time as the servant. It is the simultaneous contact with the bamboo or rope which defiles. A Havik cannot receive fruit or money directly from an Untouchable. But some objects stay impure and can be conductors of impurity even after contact. Pollution lingers in cotton cloth, metal cooking vessels, cooked food. Luckily for collaboration between the castes, ground does not act as a conductor. But straw which covers it does.

‘A Brahmin should not be in the same part of his cattle shed as his Untouchable servant, for fear that they may both step on places connected through overlapping straws on the floor. Even though a Havik and an Untouchable simultaneously bathe in the village pond, the Havik is able to attain a state of *Madi* (purity) because the water goes to the ground, and the ground does not transmit impurity.’ (p. 173)

The more deeply we go into this and similar rules, the more obvious it becomes that we are studying symbolic systems. Is

Key
↑ i.e., MEANING; VALUE

No toilet paper!

Jewish; Japanese

?!.

this then really the difference between ritual pollution and our ideas of dirt: Are our ideas hygienic where theirs are symbolic? Not a bit of it: I am going to argue that our ideas of dirt also express symbolic systems and that the difference between pollution behaviour in one part of the world and another is only a matter of detail.

Before we start to think about ritual pollution we must go down in sack-cloth and ashes and scrupulously re-examine our own ideas of dirt. Dividing them into their parts, we should distinguish any elements which we know to be the result of our recent history.

There are two notable differences between our contemporary European ideas of defilement and those, say, of primitive cultures. One is that dirt avoidance for us is a matter of hygiene or aesthetics and is not related to our religion. I shall say more about the specialisation of ideas which separates our notions of dirt from religion in Chapter 5 (Primitive Worlds). The second difference is that our idea of dirt is dominated by the knowledge of pathogenic organisms. The bacterial transmission of disease was a great nineteenth-century discovery. It produced the most radical revolution in the history of medicine. So much has it transformed our lives that it is difficult to think of dirt except in the context of pathogenicity. Yet obviously our ideas of dirt are not so recent. We must be able to make the effort to think back beyond the last 100 years and to analyse the bases of dirt-avoidance, before it was transformed by bacteriology; for example, before spitting deftly into a spittoon was counted unhygienic.

If we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as "matter out of place." This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in-so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity.

We can recognise in our own notions of dirt that we are using a kind of omnibus compendium which includes all the rejected elements of ordered systems. It is a relative idea. Shoes

are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing; similarly, bathroom equipment in the drawing room; clothing lying on chairs; out-door things in-doors; upstairs things downstairs; under-clothing appearing where over-clothing should be, and so on. In short, our pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications.

We should now force ourselves to focus on dirt. Defined in this way it appears as a residual category, rejected from our normal scheme of classifications. In trying to focus on it we run against our strongest mental habit. For it seems that whatever we perceive is organised into patterns for which we, the perceivers, are largely responsible. Perceiving is not a matter of passively allowing an organ – say of sight or hearing – to receive a ready-made impression from without, like a palette receiving a spot of paint. Recognising and remembering are not matters of stirring up old images of past impressions. It is generally agreed that all our impressions are schematically determined from the start. As perceivers we select from all the stimuli falling on our senses only those which interest us, and our interests are governed by a pattern-making tendency, sometimes called schema (see Bartlett, 1932). In a chaos of shifting impressions, each of us constructs a stable world in which objects have recognisable shapes, are located in depth, and have permanence. In perceiving we are building, taking some cues and rejecting others. The most acceptable cues are those which fit most easily into the pattern that is being built up. Ambiguous ones tend to be treated as if they harmonised with the rest of the pattern. Discordant ones tend to be rejected. If they are accepted the structure of assumptions has to be modified. As learning proceeds objects are named. Their names then affect the way they are perceived next time: once labelled they are more speedily slotted into the pigeon-holes in future.

As time goes on and experiences pile up, we make a greater and greater investment in our system of labels. So a conservative bias is built in. It gives us confidence. At any time we may have to modify our structure of assumptions to accommodate new experience, but the more consistent experience is with the past, the more confidence we can have in our assumptions.

Naive realism

KEY
cf. The
Don Bue
Holix

Definition

!!

Uncomfortable facts which refuse to be fitted in, we find ourselves ignoring or distorting so that they do not disturb these established assumptions. By and large anything we take note of is pre-selected and organised in the very act of perceiving. We share with other animals a kind of filtering mechanism which at first only lets in sensations we know how to use.

But what about the other ones? What about the possible experiences which do not pass the filter? Is it possible to force attention into less habitual tracks? Can we even examine the filtering mechanism itself?

We can certainly force ourselves to observe things which our schematising tendencies have caused us to miss. It always gives a jar to find our first facile observation at fault. Even to gaze steadily at distorting apparatus makes some people feel physically sick, as if their own balance was attacked. Mrs. Abercrombie put a group of medical students through a course of experiments designed to show them the high degree of selection we use in the simplest observations. 'But you can't have all the world a jelly,' one protested. 'It is as though my world has been cracked open,' said another. Others reacted in a more strongly hostile way (p. 131).

But it is not always an unpleasant experience to confront ambiguity. Obviously it is more tolerable in some areas than in others. There is a whole gradient on which laughter, revulsion and shock belong at different points and intensities. The experience can be stimulating. The richness of poetry depends on the use of ambiguity, as Empson has shown. The possibility of seeing a sculpture equally well as a landscape or as a reclining nude enriches the work's interest. Ehrenzweig has even argued that we enjoy works of art because they enable us to go behind the explicit structures of our normal experience. Aesthetic pleasure arises from the perceiving of inarticulate forms.

I apologise for using anomaly and ambiguity as if they were synonymous. Strictly they are not: an anomaly is an element which does not fit a given set or series; ambiguity is a character of statements capable of two interpretations. But reflection on examples shows that there is very little advantage in distinguishing between these two terms in their practical application. Treacle is neither liquid nor solid; it could be said to give an ambiguous sense-impression. We can also say that treacle is anomalous in the classification of liquids and solids, being in neither one nor the other set.

Granted, then, that we are capable of confronting anomaly. When something is firmly classed as anomalous the outline of the set in which it is not a member is clarified. To illustrate this I quote from Sartre's essay on stickiness. Viscosity, he says, repels in its own right, as a primary experience. An infant, plunging its hands into a jar of honey, is instantly involved in contemplating the formal properties of solids and liquids and the essential relation between the subjective experiencing self and the experienced world (1943, p. 696 seq.). The viscous is a state half-way between solid and liquid. It is like a cross-section in a process of change. It is unstable, but it does not flow. It is soft, yielding and compressible. There is no gliding on its surface. Its stickiness is a trap, it clings like a leech; it attacks the boundary between myself and it. Long columns falling off my fingers suggest my own substance flowing into the pool of stickiness. Plunging into water gives a different impression. I remain a solid, but to touch stickiness is to risk diluting myself into viscosity. Stickiness is clinging, like a too-possessive dog or mistress. In this way the first contact with stickiness enriches a child's experience. He has learnt something about himself and the properties of matter and the interrelation between self and other things.

I cannot do justice, in shortening the passage, to the marvellous reflections to which Sartre is provoked by the idea of stickiness as an aberrant fluid or a melting solid. But it makes the point that we can and do reflect with profit on our main classifications and on experiences which do not exactly fit them. In general these reflections confirm our confidence in the main classifications. Sartre argues that melting, clinging viscosity is judged an ignoble form of existence in its very first manifestations. So from these earliest tactile adventures we have always known that life does not conform to our most simple categories.

There are several ways of treating anomalies. Negatively, we can ignore, just not perceive them, or perceiving we can condemn. Positively we can deliberately confront the anomaly and try to create a new pattern of reality in which it has a place. It is not impossible for an individual to revise his own personal scheme of classifications. But no individual lives in isolation and his scheme will have been partly received from others.

Culture, in the sense of the public, standardised values of a community, mediates the experience of individuals. It provides

Key
Definition

TRUTH

GOODNESS

BEAUTY

Purity and Danger

- CULTURE

in advance some basic categories, a positive pattern in which ideas and values are tidily ordered. And above all, it has authority, since each is induced to assent because of the assent of others. But its public character makes its categories more rigid. A private person may revise his pattern of assumptions or not. It is a private matter. But cultural categories are public matters. They cannot so easily be subject to revision. Yet they cannot neglect the challenge of aberrant forms. Any given system of classification must give rise to anomalies, and any given culture must confront events which seem to defy its assumptions. It cannot ignore the anomalies which its scheme produces, except at risk of forfeiting confidence. This is why, I suggest, we find in any culture worthy of the name various provisions for dealing with ambiguous or anomalous events.

First, by settling for one or other interpretation, ambiguity is often reduced. For example, when a monstrous birth occurs, the defining lines between humans and animals may be threatened. If a monstrous birth can be labelled an event of a peculiar kind the categories can be restored. So the Nuer treat monstrous births as baby hippopotamuses, accidentally born to humans and, with this labelling, the appropriate action is clear. They gently lay them in the river where they belong (Evans-Pritchard, 1956, p. 84).

Second, the existence of anomaly can be physically controlled. Thus in some West African tribes the rule that twins should be killed at birth eliminates a social anomaly, if it is held that two humans could not be born from the same womb at the same time. Or take the night-crowing cocks. If their necks are promptly wrung, they do not live to contradict the definition of a cock as a bird that crows at dawn.

Third, a rule of avoiding anomalous things affirms and strengthens the definitions to which they do not conform. So where Leviticus abhors crawling things, we should see the abomination as the negative side of the pattern of things approved.

Fourth, anomalous events may be labelled dangerous. Admittedly individuals sometimes feel anxiety confronted with anomaly. But it would be a mistake to treat institutions as if they evolved in the same way as a person's spontaneous reactions. Such public beliefs are more likely to be produced in the course of reducing dissonance between individual and general interpretations. Following the work of Festinger it is obvious that a person

Secular Defilement

when he finds his own convictions at variance with those of friends, either wavers or tries to convince the friends of their error. Attributing danger is one way of putting a subject above dispute. It also helps to enforce conformity, as we shall show below in a chapter on morals (Chapter 8).

Fifth, ambiguous symbols can be used in ritual for the same ends as they are used in poetry and mythology, to enrich meaning or to call attention to other levels of existence. We shall see in the last chapter how ritual, by using symbols of anomaly, can incorporate evil and death along with life and goodness, into a single, grand, unifying pattern.

To conclude, if uncleanness is matter out of place, we must approach it through order. Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained. To recognise this is the first step towards insight into pollution. It involves us in no clear-cut distinction between sacred and secular. The same principle applies throughout. Furthermore, it involves no special distinction between primitives and moderns: we are all subject to the same rules. But in the primitive culture the rule of patterning works with greater force and more total comprehensiveness. With the moderns it applies to disjointed, separate areas of existence.

The Abominations of Leviticus

~~Abomination which will make even all bones call the particular restrictions.~~

Holiness is the attribute of Godhead. Its root means 'set apart'. What else does it mean? We should start any cosmological enquiry by seeking the principles of power and danger. In the Old Testament we find blessing as the source of all good things, and the withdrawal of blessing as the source of all dangers. The blessing of God makes the land possible for men to live in.

God's work through the blessing is essentially to create order, through which men's affairs prosper. Fertility of women, livestock and fields is promised as a result of the blessing and this is to be obtained by keeping covenant with God and observing all His precepts and ceremonies (Deut. XXVIII, 1-14). Where the blessing is withdrawn and the power of the curse unleashed, there is barrenness, pestilence, confusion. For Moses said:

'But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you to this day, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading trough. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in and cursed shall you be when you go out. The Lord will send upon you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your doings, because you have forsaken me . . . The Lord will smite you with consumption, and with fever, inflammation, and fiery heat, and with drought, and with blasting and with mildew; they shall pursue you till you perish. And the heavens over your head shall be brass and the earth beyond you shall be iron. The Lord will make the rain of your land powder and dust; from heaven it shall come down upon you until you are destroyed.'

(Deut. XXVIII, 15-24)

From this it is clear that the positive and negative precepts are held to be efficacious and not merely expressive: observing them draws down prosperity, infringing them brings danger. *
We are thus entitled to treat them in the same way as we treat primitive ritual avoidances whose breach unleashes danger to

men. The precepts and ceremonies alike are focussed on the idea of the holiness of God which men must create in their own lives. So this is a universe in which men prosper by conforming to holiness and perish when they deviate from it. If there were no other clues we should be able to find out the Hebrew idea of the holy by examining the precepts by which men conform to it. It is evidently not goodness in the sense of an all-embracing humane kindness. Justice and moral goodness may well illustrate holiness and form part of it, but holiness embraces other ideas as well.

Granted that its root means separateness, the next idea that emerges is of the Holy as wholeness and completeness. Much of Leviticus is taken up with stating the physical perfection that is required of things presented in the temple and of persons approaching it. The animals offered in sacrifice must be without blemish, women must be purified after childbirth, lepers should be separated and ritually cleansed before being allowed to approach it once they are cured. All bodily discharges are defiling and disqualify from approach to the temple. Priests may only come into contact with death when their own close kin die. But the high priest must never have contact with death.

Levit. xxi

17. Say to Aaron, None of your descendants throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the bread of his God. 18. For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long. 19. or a man who has an injured foot or an injured hand, 20. or a hunch-back, or a dwarf, or a man with a defect in his sight or an itching disease or scabs, or crushed testicles; 21. no man of the descendants of Aaron the priest who has a blemish shall come near to offer the Lord's offerings by fire; ...'

In other words, he must be perfect as a man, if he is to be a priest.

This much reiterated idea of physical completeness is also worked out in the social sphere and particularly in the warriors' camp. The culture of the Israelites was brought to the pitch of greatest intensity when they prayed and when they fought. The army could not win without the blessing and to keep the blessing in the camp they had to be specially holy. So the camp was to be preserved from defilement like the Temple. Here

again all bodily discharges disqualified a man from entering the camp as they would disqualify a worshipper from approaching the altar. A warrior who had had an issue of the body in the night should keep outside the camp all day and only return after sunset, having washed. Natural functions producing bodily waste were to be performed outside the camp (Deut. xxiii, 10-15). In short the idea of holiness was given an external, physical expression in the wholeness of the body seen as a perfect container.

Wholeness is also extended to signify completeness in a social context. An important enterprise, once begun, must not be left incomplete. This way of lacking wholeness also disqualifies a man from fighting. Before a battle the captains shall proclaim:

Deut. xx

'5. What man is there that has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man dedicate it. 6. What man is there that has planted a vineyard and has not yet enjoyed its fruit? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man enjoy its fruit. 7. And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife and has not taken her? Let him go back to his house, lest he die in the battle and another man take her.'

Admittedly there is no suggestion that this rule implies defilement. It is not said that a man with a half-finished project on his hands is defiled in the same way that a leper is defiled. The next verse in fact goes on to say that fearful and faint-hearted men should go home lest they spread their fears. But there is a strong suggestion in other passages that a man should not put his hand to the plough and then turn back. Pedersen goes so far as to say that:

'in all these cases a man has started a new important undertaking without having finished it yet . . . a new totality has come into existence. To make a breach in this prematurely, i.e. before it has attained maturity or has been finished, involves a serious risk of sin'. (Vol. III, p. 9)

If we follow Pedersen, then blessing and success in war required a man to be whole in body, whole-hearted and trailing no uncompleted schemes. There is an echo of this actual passage

*
cf. MICHEL-ANGELO'S
"DAVID":
PERFECT
BODY...

SHOCK
OF
CHRIST:
A HIGH PRIEST
WHO IS
KILLED.

|| Key.

in the New Testament parable of the man who gave a great feast and whose invited guests incurred his anger by making excuses (Luke XIV, 16-24; Matt. XXII. See Black & Rowley, 1962, p. 836). One of the guests had bought a new farm, one had bought ten oxen and had not yet tried them, and one had married a wife. If according to the old Law each could have validly justified his refusal by reference to Deut. XX, the parable supports Pedersen's view that interruption of new projects was held to be bad in civil as well as military contexts.

Other precepts develop the idea of wholeness in another direction. The metaphors of the physical body and of the new undertaking relate to the perfection and completeness of the individual and his work. Other precepts extend holiness to species and categories. Hybrids and other confusions are abominated.

Lev. xviii

'23. And you shall not lie with any beast and defile yourself with it, neither shall any woman give herself to a beast to lie with it: it is perversion

The word 'perversion' is a significant mistranslation of the rare Hebrew word *tebhel*, which has as its meaning mixing or confusion. The same theme is taken up in Leviticus XIX, 19.

'You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall there come upon you a garment of cloth made of two kinds of stuff.'

All these injunctions are prefaced by the general command:

'Be holy, for I am holy.'

We can conclude that holiness is exemplified by completeness. Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused.

Another set of precepts refines on this last point. Holiness means keeping distinct the categories of creation. It therefore involves correct definition, discrimination and order. Under this head all the rules of sexual morality exemplify the holy. Incest and adultery (Lev. XVIII, 6-20) are against holiness, in the simple sense of right order. Morality does not conflict with

holiness, but holiness is more a matter of separating that which should be separated than of protecting the rights of husbands and brothers.

Then follows in chapter XIX another list of actions which are contrary to holiness. Developing the idea of holiness as order, not confusion, this list upholds rectitude and straight-dealing as holy, and contradiction and double-dealing as against holiness. Theft, lying, false witness, cheating in weights and measures, all kinds of dissembling such as speaking ill of the deaf (and presumably smiling to their face), hating your brother in your heart (while presumably speaking kindly to him), these are clearly contradictions between what seems and what is. This chapter also says much about generosity and love, but these are positive commands, while I am concerned with negative rules.

We have now laid a good basis for approaching the laws about clean and unclean meats. To be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind. The dietary rules merely develop the metaphor of holiness on the same lines.

First we should start with livestock, the herds of cattle, camels, sheep and goats which were the livelihood of the Israelites. These animals were clean inasmuch as contact with them did not require purification before approaching the Temple. Livestock, like the inhabited land, received the blessing of God. Both land and livestock were fertile by the blessing, both were drawn into the divine order. The farmer's duty was to preserve the blessing. For one thing, he had to preserve the order of creation. So no hybrids, as we have seen, either in the fields or in the herds or in the clothes made from wool and flax. To some extent men covenanted with their land and cattle in the same way as God covenanted with them. Men respected the first born of their cattle, obliged them to keep the Sabbath. Cattle were literally domesticated as slaves. They had to be brought into the social order in order to enjoy the blessing. The difference between cattle and the wild beasts is that the wild beasts have no covenant to protect them. It is possible that the Israelites were like other pastoralists who do not relish wild game. The Nuer of the South Sudan, for instance, apply a sanction of disapproval of a man who lives by hunting. To be driven to eating wild meat is the sign of a poor herdsman. So it would be probably wrong to think of the Israelites as longing

BOUNDARY
TRANSgressions

Key
2

Key
2

sense in relation to religious beliefs which it does not carry in technology and art. There may be something in this for a certain section of the English-speaking world.

The idea of a primitive economy is slightly romantic. It is true that we are materially and technically incomparably better equipped, but no one would frankly base a cultural distinction on purely materialist grounds. The facts of relative poverty and wealth are not in question. But the idea of the primitive economy is one which handles goods and services without the intervention of money. So the primitives have the advantage over us in that they encounter economic reality direct, while we are always being deflected from our course by the complicated, unpredictable and independent behaviour of money. But on this basis, when it comes to the spiritual economy, we seem to have the advantage. For their relation to their external environment is mediated by demons and ghosts whose behaviour is complicated and unpredictable, while we encounter our environment more simply and directly. This latter advantage we owe to our wealth and material progress which has enabled other developments to take place. So on this reckoning, the primitive is ultimately at a disadvantage both in the economic and spiritual field. Those who feel this double superiority are naturally inhibited from flaunting it and this is presumably why they prefer not to distinguish primitive culture at all.

Continentalists seem to have no such squeamishness. *'Le primitif'* enjoys honour in the pages of Leenhard, Levi-Strauss, Ricoeur and Eliade. The only conclusion that I can draw is that they are not secretly convinced of superiority, and are intensely appreciative of forms of culture other than their own.

Powers and Dangers

Granted that disorder spoils pattern, it also provides the material of pattern. Order implies restriction; from all possible materials, a limited selection has been made and from all possible relations a limited set has been used. So disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realised in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite. This is why, though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognise that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolises both danger and power.

Ritual recognises the potency of disorder. In the disorder of the mind, in dreams, faints and frenzies, ritual expects to find powers and truths which cannot be reached by conscious effort. Energy to command and special powers of healing come to those who can abandon rational control for a time. Sometimes an Andaman Islander leaves his band and wanders in the forest like a madman. When he returns to his senses and to human society he has gained occult power of healing (Radcliffe-Brown, 1933, p. 139). This is a very common notion, widely attested. Webster in his chapter on the Making of a Magician (*The Sociological Study of Magic*), gives many examples. I also quote the Ehanzu, a tribe in the central region of Tanzania, where one of the recognised ways of acquiring a diviner's skill is by going mad in the bush. Virginia Adam, who worked among this tribe, tells me that their ritual cycle culminates in annual rain rituals. If at the expected time rain fails, people suspect sorcery. To undo the effects of sorcery they take a simpleton and send him wandering into the bush. In the course of his wanderings he unknowingly destroys the sorcerer's work.

COSMOS

CHAOS

DIS-ORDER

MADNESS

In these beliefs there is a double play on inarticulateness. First there is a venture into the disordered regions of the mind. Second there is the venture beyond the confines of society. The man who comes back from these inaccessible regions brings with him a power not available to those who have stayed in the control of themselves and of society.

This ritual play on articulate and inarticulate forms is crucial to understanding pollution. In ritual form it is treated as if it were quick with power to maintain itself in being, yet always liable to attack. Formlessness is also credited with powers, some dangerous, some good. We have seen how the abominations of Leviticus are the obscure unclassifiable elements which do not fit the pattern of the cosmos. They are incompatible with holiness and blessing. The play on form and formlessness is even more clear in the rituals of society.

Key

"WANDERING
JEW"
in 19th c.

First, consider beliefs about persons in a marginal state. These are people who are somehow left out in the patterning of society, who are placeless. They may be doing nothing morally wrong, but their status is undefinable. Take, for example, the unborn child. Its present position is ambiguous, its future equally. For no one can say what sex it will have or whether it will survive the hazards of infancy. It is often treated as both vulnerable and dangerous. The Lele regard the unborn child and its mother as in constant danger, but they also credit the unborn child with capricious ill-will which makes it a danger to others. When pregnant, a Lele woman tries to be considerate about not approaching sick persons lest the proximity of the child in her womb causes coughing or fever to increase.

Among the Nyakyusa a similar belief is recorded. A pregnant woman is thought to reduce the quantity of grain she approaches, because the foetus in her is voracious and snatches it. She must not speak to people who are reaping or brewing without first making a ritual gesture of goodwill to cancel the danger. They speak of the foetus 'with jaws agape' snatching food, and explain it by the inevitability of the 'seed within' fighting the 'seed without'.

'The child in the belly . . . is like a witch; it will damage food like witchcraft; beer is spoiled and tastes nasty, food does not grow, the smith's iron is not easily worked, the milk is not good.'

Even the father is endangered at war or in the hunt by his wife's pregnancy (Wilson, pp. 138-9).

Levy-Bruhl noted that menstrual blood and miscarriage sometimes attract the same kind of belief. The Maoris regard menstrual blood as the sort of human being *manqué*. If the blood had not flowed it would have become a person, so it has the impossible status of a dead person that has never lived. He quoted a common belief that a foetus born prematurely has a malevolent spirit, dangerous to the living (pp. 390-6). Levy-Bruhl did not generalise that danger lies in marginal states, but Van Gennep had more sociological insight. He saw society as a house with rooms and corridors in which passage from one to another is dangerous. Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others. The danger is controlled by ritual which precisely separates him from his old status, segregates him for a time and then publicly declares his entry to his new status. Not only is transition itself dangerous, but also the rituals of segregation are the most dangerous phase of the rites. So often do we read that boys die in initiation ceremonies, or that their sisters and mothers are told to fear for their safety, or that they used in the old days to die from hardship or fright, or by supernatural punishment for their misdeeds. Then somewhat tamely come the accounts of the actual ceremonies which are so safe that the threats of danger sound like a hoax (Vansina, 1955). But we can be sure that the trumped-up dangers express something important about marginality. To say that the boys risk their lives says precisely that to go out of the formal structure and to enter the margins is to be exposed to power that is enough to kill them or make their manhood. The theme of death and rebirth, of course, has other symbolic functions: the initiates die to their old life and are reborn to the new. The whole repertoire of ideas concerning pollution and purification are used to mark the gravity of the event and the power of ritual to remake a man - this is straightforward.

BOOT
CAMP.

During the marginal period which separates ritual dying and ritual rebirth, the novices in initiation are temporarily outcast. For the duration of the rite they have no place in society. Sometimes they actually go to live far away outside it. Sometimes they live near enough for unplanned contacts to take place between full social beings and the outcasts. Then we find them

behaving like dangerous criminal characters. They are licensed to waylay, steal, rape. This behaviour is even enjoined on them. To behave anti-socially is the proper expression of their marginal condition (Webster, 1908, chapter III). To have been in the margins is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power. It is consistent with the ideas about form and formlessness to treat initiands coming out of seclusion as if they were themselves charged with power, hot, dangerous, requiring insulation and a time for cooling down. Dirt, obscenity and lawlessness are as relevant symbolically to the rites of seclusion as other ritual expressions of their condition. They are not to be blamed for misconduct any more than the foetus in the womb for its spite and greed.

It seems that if a person has no place in the social system and is therefore a marginal being, all precaution against danger must come from others. He cannot help his abnormal situation. This is roughly how we ourselves regard marginal people in a secular, not a ritual context. Social workers in our society, concerned with the after-care of ex-prisoners, report a difficulty on resettling them in steady jobs, a difficulty which comes from the attitude of society at large. A man who has spent any time 'inside' is put permanently 'outside' the ordinary social system. With no rite of aggregation which can definitively assign him to a new position he remains in the margins, with other people who are similarly credited with unreliability, unteachability, and all the wrong social attitudes. The same goes for persons who have entered institutions for the treatment of mental disease. So long as they stay at home their peculiar behaviour is accepted. Once they have been formally classified as abnormal, the very same behaviour is counted intolerable. A report on a Canadian project in 1951 to change the attitude to mental ill-health suggests that there is a threshold of tolerance marked by entry to a mental hospital. If a person has never moved out of society into this marginal state, any of his eccentricities are comfortably tolerated by his neighbours. Behaviour which a psychologist would class at once as pathological is commonly dismissed as 'just a quirk', or 'He'll get over it', or 'It takes all sorts to make a world'. But once a patient is admitted to a mental hospital, tolerance is withdrawn. Behaviour which was formerly judged to be so normal that the psychologist's suggestions raised strong hostility, was now judged to be abnormal (quoted in Cumming).

So mental health workers find exactly the same problems in rehabilitating their discharged patients as do the prisoners' aid societies. The fact that these common assumptions about ex-prisoners and lunatics are self-validating is not relevant here. It is more interesting to know that marginal status produces the same reactions the world over, and that these are deliberately represented in marginal rites.

To plot a map of the powers and dangers in a primitive universe, we need to underline the interplay of ideas of form and formlessness. So many ideas about power are based on an idea of society as a series of forms contrasted with surrounding non-form. There is a power in the forms and other power in the inarticulate area, margins, confused lines, and beyond the external boundaries. If pollution is a particular class of danger, to see where it belongs in the universe of dangers we need an inventory of all the possible sources of power. In a primitive culture the physical agency of misfortune is not so significant as the personal intervention to which it can be traced. The effects are the same the world over: drought is drought, hunger is hunger; epidemic, child labour, infirmity – most of the experiences are held in common. But each culture knows a distinctive set of laws governing the way these disasters fall. The main links between persons and misfortunes are personal links. So our inventory of powers must proceed by classifying all kinds of personal intervention in the fortunes of others.

The spiritual powers which human action can unleash can roughly be divided into two classes – internal and external. The first reside within the psyche of the agent – such as evil eye, witchcraft, gifts of vision or prophecy. The second are external symbols on which the agent must consciously work: spells, blessings, curses, charms and formulas and invocations. These powers require actions by which spiritual power is discharged.

This distinction between internal and external sources of power is often correlated with another distinction, between uncontrolled and controlled power. According to widespread beliefs, the internal psychic powers are not necessarily triggered off by the intention of the agent. He may be quite unaware that he possesses them or that they are active. These beliefs vary from place to place. For example, Joan of Arc did not know when her voices would speak to her, could not summon

Key: SHE DRESSED IN MEN'S CLOTHES AND SHAVED HER HAIR: GENDER CONFUSION.

Great examples.

of social structure. If some beliefs seem to attribute free-floating spiritual powers in a haphazard manner, closer inspection shows consistency. The only circumstances in which spiritual powers seem to flourish independently of the formal social system are when the system itself is exceptionally devoid of formal structure, when legitimate authority is always under challenge or when the rival segments of an acephalous political system resort to mediation. Then the main contenders for political power have to court for their side the holders of free-floating spiritual power. Thus it is beyond doubt that the social system is thought of as quick with creative and sustaining power.

Now is the time to identify pollution, granted that all spiritual powers are part of the social system. They express it and provide institutions for manipulating it. This means that the power in the universe is ultimately hitched to society, since so many changes of fortune are set off by persons in one kind of social position or another. But there are other dangers to be reckoned with, which persons may set off knowingly or unknowingly, which are not part of the psyche and which are not to be bought or learned by initiation and training. These are pollution powers which inhere in the structure of ideas itself and which punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate. It follows from this that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined.

A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone. Bringing pollution, unlike sorcery and witchcraft, is a capacity which men share with animals, for pollution is not always set off by humans. Pollution can be committed intentionally, but intention is irrelevant to its effect – it is more likely to happen inadvertently.

This is as near as I can get to defining a particular class of dangers which are not powers vested in humans, but which can be released by human action. The power which presents a danger for careless humans is very evidently a power inhering in the structure of ideas, a power by which the structure is expected to protect itself.

7

External Boundaries

The idea of society is a powerful image. It is potent in its own right to control or to stir men to action. This image has form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure. Its outlines contain power to reward conformity and repulse attack. There is energy in its margins and unstructured areas. For symbols of society, any human experience of structures, margins or boundaries is ready to hand.

Van Gennep shows how thresholds symbolise beginnings of new statuses. Why does the bridegroom carry his bride over the lintel? Because the step, the beam and the doorposts make a frame which is the necessary everyday condition of entering a house. The homely experience of going through a door is able to express so many kinds of entrance. So also are crossroads and arches, new seasons, new clothes and the rest. No experience is too lowly to be taken up in ritual and given a lofty meaning. The more personal and intimate the source of ritual symbolism, the more telling its message. The more the symbol is drawn from the common fund of human experience, the more wide and certain its reception.

The structure of living organisms is better able to reflect complex social forms than doorposts and lintels. So we find that the rituals of sacrifice specify what kind of animal shall be used, young or old, male, female or neutered, and that these rules signify various aspects of the situation which calls for sacrifice. The way the animal is to be slaughtered is also laid down. The Dinka cut the beast longitudinally through the sexual organs if the sacrifice is intended to undo an incest; in half across the middle for celebrating a truce; they suffocate it for

Note!

"Liminal" experience = "threshold" (Latin: limen -)

some occasions and trample it to death for others. Even more direct is the symbolism worked upon the human body. The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures. We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva and the rest unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body.

It is easy to see that the body of a sacrificial ox is being used as a diagram of a social situation. But when we try to interpret rituals of the human body in the same way the psychological tradition turns its face away from society, back towards the individual. Public rituals may express public concerns when they use inanimate doorposts or animal sacrifices: but public rituals enacted on the human body are taken to express personal and private concerns. There is no possible justification for this shift of interpretation just because the rituals work upon human flesh. As far as I know the case has never been methodically stated. Its protagonists merely proceed from unchallenged assumptions, which arise from the strong similarity between certain ritual forms and the behaviour of psychopathic individuals. The assumption is that in some sense primitive cultures correspond to infantile stages in the development of the human psyche. Consequently such rites are interpreted as if they express the same preoccupations which fill the minds of psychopaths or infants.

Let me take two modern attempts to use primitive cultures to buttress psychological insights. Both stem from a long line of similar discussions, and both are misleading because the relation between culture and individual psyche are not made clear.

Bettelheim's *Symbolic Wounds* is mainly an interpretation of circumcision and initiation rites. The author tries to use the set rituals of Australians and Africans to throw light on psychological phenomena. He is particularly concerned to show that psychoanalysts have over-emphasised girls' envy of the male sex and overlooked the importance of boys' envy of the female sex. The idea came to him originally in studying groups

of schizophrenic children approaching adolescence. It seems very likely that the idea is sound and important. I am not at all claiming to criticise his insight into schizophrenia. But when he argues that rituals which are explicitly designed to produce genital bleeding in males are intended to express male envy of female reproductive processes, the anthropologist should protest that this is an inadequate interpretation of a public rite. It is inadequate because it is merely descriptive. What is being carved in human flesh is an image of society. And in the moiety- and section-divided tribes he cites, the Murngin and Arunta, it seems more likely that the public rites are concerned to create a symbol of the symmetry of the two halves of society.

The other book is *Life against Death*, in which Brown outlines an explicit comparison between the culture of 'archaic man' and our own culture, in terms of the infantile and neurotic fantasies which they seem to express. Their common assumptions about primitive culture derive from Roheim (1925): primitive culture is autoplasmic, ours is alloplasmic. The primitive seeks to achieve his desires by self-manipulation, performing surgical rites upon his own body to produce fertility in nature, subordination in women or hunting success. In modern culture we seek to achieve our desires by operating directly on the external environment, with the impressive technical results that are the most obvious distinction between the two types of cultures. Bettelheim adopts this summing up of the difference between the ritual and the technical bias in civilisation. But he supposes that the primitive culture is produced by inadequate, immature personalities, and even that the psychological shortcomings of the savage accounts for his feeble technical achievements:

'If preliterate peoples had personality structures as complex as those of modern man, if their defences were as elaborate and their consciences as refined and demanding; if the dynamic interplay between ego, superego and id were as intricate and if their ego's were as well adapted to meet and change external reality - they would have developed societies equally complex, though probably different. Their societies have, however, remained small and relatively ineffective in coping with the external environment. It may be that one of the reasons for this is their tendency to try to solve problems by autoplasmic rather than alloplasmic manipulation.' (p. 87)

il. cannab. in

outsiders hurling bits of bone and other stuff at weak points in the structure.

But now we are ready to broach the central question. Why should bodily refuse be a symbol of danger and of power? Why should sorcerers be thought to qualify for initiation by shedding blood or committing incest or anthropophagy? Why, when initiated, should their art consist largely of manipulating powers thought to inhere in the margins of the human body? Why should bodily margins be thought to be specially invested with power and danger?

First, we can rule out the idea that public rituals express common infantile fantasies. These erotic desires which it is said to be the infant's dream to satisfy within the body's bounds are presumably common to the human race. Consequently body symbolism is part of the common stock of symbols, deeply emotive because of the individual's experience. But rituals draw on this common stock of symbols selectively. Some develop here, others there. Psychological explanations cannot of their nature account for what is culturally distinctive.

Second, all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. So also have bodily parings, skin, nail, hair clippings and sweat. The mistake is to treat bodily margins in isolation from all other margins. There is no reason to assume any primacy for the individual's attitude to his own bodily and emotional experience, any more than for his cultural and social experience. This is the clue which explains the unevenness with which different aspects of the body are treated in the rituals of the world. In some, menstrual pollution is feared as a lethal danger; in others not at all (see Chapter 9). In some, death pollution is a daily preoccupation; in others not at all. In some, excreta is dangerous, in others it is only a joke. In India cooked food and saliva are pollution-prone, but Bushmen collect melon seeds from their mouths for later roasting and eating (Marshall Thomas, p. 44).

Each culture has its own special risks and problems. To which

particular bodily margins its beliefs attribute power depends on what situation the body is mirroring. It seems that our deepest fears and desires take expression with a kind of witty aptness. To understand bodily pollution we should try to argue back from the known dangers of society to the known selection of bodily themes and try to recognise what appositeness is there.

In pursuing a last-ditch reduction of all behaviour to the personal preoccupations of individuals with their own bodies the psychologists are merely sticking to their last.

'The derisive remark was once made against psychoanalysis that the unconscious sees a penis in every convex object and a vagina or anus in every concave one. I find that this sentence well characterises the facts.'

(Ferenczi, *Sex in Psychoanalysis*, p. 227, quoted by Brown)

It is the duty of every craftsman to stick to his last. The sociologists have the duty of meeting one kind of reductionism with their own. Just as it is true that everything symbolises the body, so it is equally true (and all the more so for that reason) that the body symbolises everything else. Out of this symbolism, which in fold upon fold of interior meaning leads back to the experience of the self with its body, the sociologist is justified in trying to work in the other direction to draw out some layers of insight about the self's experience in society.

If anal eroticism is expressed at the cultural level we are not entitled to expect a population of anal erotics. We must look around for whatever it is that has made appropriate any cultural analogy with anal eroticism. The procedure in a modest way is like Freud's analysis of jokes. Trying to find a connection between the verbal form and the amusement derived from it he laboriously reduced joke interpretation to a few general rules. No comedian script-writer could use the rules for inventing jokes, but they help us to see some connections between laughter, the unconscious, and the structure of stories. The analogy is fair for pollution is like an inverted form of humour. It is not a joke for it does not amuse. But the structure of its symbolism uses comparison and double meaning like the structure of a joke.

Four kinds of social pollution seem worth distinguishing. The first is danger pressing on external boundaries; the second, danger from transgressing the internal lines of the system; the

Society
↓
Body.

Purity and Danger

third danger in the margins of the lines. The fourth is danger from internal contradiction, when some of the basic postulates are denied by other basic postulates, so that at certain points the system seems to be at war with itself. In this chapter I show how the symbolism of the body's boundaries is used in this kind of unfunny wit to express danger to community boundaries.

The ritual life of the Coorgs (Srinivas) gives the impression of a people obsessed by the fear of dangerous impurities entering their system. They treat the body as if it were a beleaguered town, every ingress and exit guarded for spies and traitors. Anything issuing from the body is never to be re-admitted, but strictly avoided. The most dangerous pollution is for anything which has once emerged gaining re-entry. A little myth, trivial by other standards, justifies so much of their behaviour and system of thought that the ethnographer has to refer to it three or four times. A Goddess in every trial of strength or cunning defeated her two brothers. Since future precedence depended on the outcome of these contests, they decided to defeat her by a ruse. She was tricked into taking out of her mouth the betel that she was chewing to see if it was redder than theirs and into popping it back again. Once she had realised she had eaten something which had once been in her own mouth and was therefore defiled by saliva, though she wept and bewailed she accepted the full justice of her downfall. The mistake cancelled all her previous victories, and her brothers' eternal precedence over her was established as of right.

The Coorgs have a place within the system of Hindu castes. There is good reason to regard them as not exceptional or aberrant in Hindu India (Dumont and Pocock). Therefore they conceive status in terms of purity and impurity as these ideas are applied throughout the regime of castes. The lowest castes are the most impure and it is they whose humble services enable the higher castes to be free of bodily impurities. They wash clothes, cut hair, (dress) corpses and so on. The whole system represents a body in which by the division of labour the head does the thinking and praying and the most despised parts carry away waste matter. Each sub-caste community in a local region is conscious of its relative standing in the scale of purity. Seen from ego's position the system of caste purity is structured upwards. Those above him are more pure. All the positions below him, be they ever so intricately distinguished

External Boundaries

in relation to one another, are to him polluting. Thus for any ego within the system the threatening non-structure against which barriers must be erected lies below. The sad wit of pollution as it comments on bodily functions symbolises descent in the caste structure by contact with faeces, blood and corpses.

The Coorgs shared with other castes this fear of what is outside and below. But living in their mountain fastness they were also an isolated community, having only occasional and controllable contact with the world around. For them the model of the exits and entrances of the human body is a doubly apt symbolic focus of fears for their minority standing in the larger society. Here I am suggesting that when rituals express anxiety about the body's orifices the sociological counterpart of this anxiety is a care to protect the political and cultural unity of a minority group. The Israelites were always in their history a hard-pressed minority. In their beliefs all the bodily issues were polluting, blood, pus, excreta, semen, etc. The threatened boundaries of their body politic would be well mirrored in their care for the integrity, unity and purity of the physical body.

The Hindu caste system, while embracing all minorities, embraces them each as a distinctive, cultural sub-unit. In any given locality, any sub-caste is likely to be a minority. The purer and higher its caste status, the more of a minority it must be. Therefore the revulsion from touching corpses and excreta does not merely express the order of caste in the system as a whole. The anxiety about bodily margins expresses danger to group survival.

That the sociological approach to caste pollution is much more convincing than a psychoanalytic approach is clear when we consider what the Indian's private attitudes to defecation are. In the ritual we know that to touch excrement is to be defiled and that the latrine cleaners stand in the lowest grade of the caste hierarchy. If this pollution rule expressed individual anxieties we would expect Hindus to be controlled and secretive about the act of defecation. It comes as a considerable shock to read that slack disregard is their normal attitude, to such an extent that pavements, verandahs and public places are littered with faeces until the sweeper comes along.

Indians defecate everywhere. They defecate, mostly beside the railway tracks. But they also defecate on the beaches; they defecate on the streets; they never look for cover. . .

Key:
identity
of
body

cf.
GANDHI!

Example:
CASTE-system
AS
SOCIAL BODY

The System Shattered and Renewed

Now to confront our opening question. Can there be any people who confound sacredness with uncleanness? We have seen how the idea of contagion is at work in religion and society. We have seen that powers are attributed to any structure of ideas, and that rules of avoidance make a visible public recognition of its boundaries. But this is not to say that the sacred is unclean. Each culture must have its own notions of dirt and defilement which are contrasted with its notions of the positive structure which must not be negated. To talk about a confused blending of the Sacred and the Unclean is outright nonsense. But it still remains true that religions often sacralise the very unclean things which have been rejected with abhorrence. We must, therefore, ask how dirt, which is normally destructive, sometimes becomes creative.

First, we note that not all unclean things are used constructively in ritual. It does not suffice for something to be unclean for it to be treated as potent for good. In Israel it was unthinkable that unclean things, such as corpses and excreta could be incorporated into the Temple ritual, but only blood, and only blood shed in sacrifice. Among the Oyo Yoruba where the left hand is used for unclean work and it is deeply insulting to proffer the left hand, normal rituals sacralise the precedence of the right side, especially dancing to the right. But in the ritual of the great Ogboni cult initiates must knot their garments on the left side and dance only to the left (Morton-Williams, p. 369). Incest is a pollution among the Bushong, but an act of ritual incest is part of the sacralisation of their king and he claims that he is the filth of the nation: 'Moi, ordure, nyec'

The System Shattered and Renewed

(Vansina, p. 103). And so on. Though it is only specific individuals on specified occasions who can break the rules, it is still important to ask why these dangerous contacts are often required in rituals.

One answer lies in the nature of dirt itself. The other lies in the nature of metaphysical problems and of particular kinds of reflections which call for expression.

To deal with dirt first. In the course of any imposing of order, whether in the mind or in the external world, the attitude to rejected bits and pieces goes through two stages. First they are recognisably out of place, a threat to good order, and so are regarded as objectionable and vigorously brushed away. At this stage they have some identity: they can be seen to be unwanted bits of whatever it was they came from, hair or food or wrappings. This is the stage at which they are dangerous; their half-identity still clings to them and the clarity of the scene in which they obtrude is impaired by their presence. But a long process of pulverizing, dissolving and rotting awaits any physical things that have been recognised as dirt. In the end, all identity is gone. The origin of the various bits and pieces is lost and they have entered into the mass of common rubbish. It is unpleasant to poke about in the refuse to try to recover anything, for this revives identity. So long as identity is absent, rubbish is not dangerous. It does not even create ambiguous perceptions since it clearly belongs in a defined place, a rubbish heap of one kind or another. Even the bones of buried kings rouse little awe and the thought that the air is full of the dust of corpses of bygone races has no power to move. Where there is no differentiation there is no defilement.

'They outnumber the living, but where are all their bones?
For every man alive there are a million dead,
Has their dust gone into earth that it is never seen?
There should be no air to breathe, with it so thick,
No space for wind to blow or rain to fall:
Earth should be a cloud of dust, a soil of bones,
With no room even for our skeletons.
It is wasted time to think of it, to count its grains,
When all are alike and there is no difference in them.'

(S. Sitwell, 'Agamemnon's Tomb')

In this final stage of total disintegration, dirt is utterly undifferentiated. Thus a cycle has been completed. Dirt was

Identity

created by the differentiating activity of mind, it was a by-product of the creation of order. So it started from a state of non-differentiation; all through the process of differentiating its role was to threaten the distinctions made; finally it returns to its true indiscriminable character. Formlessness is therefore an apt symbol of beginning and of growth as it is of decay.

On this argument everything that is said to explain the revivifying role of water in religious symbolism can also apply to dirt:

'In water everything is "dissolved", every "form" is broken up, everything that has happened ceases to exist; nothing that was before remains after immersion in water, not an outline, not a "sign", not an event. Immersion is the equivalent, at the human level, of death at the cosmic level, of the cataclysm (the Flood) which periodically dissolves the world into the primeval ocean. Breaking up all forms, doing away with the past, water possesses this power of purifying, of regenerating, of giving new birth. . . . Water purifies and regenerates because it nullifies the past, and restores - even if only for a moment - the integrity of the dawn of things.'
(Eliade, 1958, p. 194)

In the same book Eliade goes on to assimilate with water two other symbols of renewal which we can, without labouring the point, equally associate with dust and corruption. One is symbolism of darkness and the other orgiastic celebration of the New Year (pp. 398-9).

In its last phase then, dirt shows itself as an apt symbol of creative formlessness. But it is from its first phase that it derives its force. The danger which is risked by boundary transgression is power. Those vulnerable margins and those attacking forces which threaten to destroy good order represent the powers inhering in the cosmos. Ritual which can harness these for good is harnessing power indeed.

So much for the aptness of the symbol itself. Now for the living situations to which it applies, and which are irremediably subject to paradox. The quest for purity is pursued by rejection. It follows that when purity is not a symbol but something lived, it must be poor and barren. It is part of our condition that the purity for which we strive and sacrifice so much turns out to be hard and dead as a stone when we get it. It is all very well for the poet to praise winter as the:

'Paragon of art,
That kills all forms of life and feeling
Save what is pure and will survive.'

(Roy Campbell)

It is another thing to try and make over our existence into an unchanging lapidary form. Purity is the enemy of change, of ambiguity and compromise. Most of us indeed would feel safer if our experience could be hard-set and fixed in form. As Sartre wrote so bitterly of the anti-semitic:

'How can anyone choose to reason falsely? It is simply the old yearning for impermeability . . . there are people who are attracted by the permanence of stone. They would like to be solid and impenetrable, they do not want change: for who knows what change might bring? . . . It is as if their own existence were perpetually in suspense. But they want to exist in all ways at once, and all in one instant. They have no wish to acquire ideas, they want them to be innate . . . they want to adopt a mode of life in which reasoning and the quest for truth play only a subordinate part, in which nothing is sought except what has already been found, in which one never becomes anything else but what one already was.'
(1948)

This diatribe implies a division between ours and the rigid black and white thinking of the anti-semitic. Whereas, of course, the yearning for rigidity is in us all. It is part of our human condition to long for hard lines and clear concepts. When we have them we have to either face the fact that some realities elude them, or else blind ourselves to the inadequacy of the concepts.

The final paradox of the search for purity is that it is an attempt to force experience into logical categories of non-contradiction. But experience is not amenable and those who make the attempt find themselves led into contradiction.

Where sexual purity is concerned it is obvious that if it is to imply no contact between the sexes it is not only a denial of sex, but must be literally barren. It also leads to contradiction. To wish all women to be chaste at all times goes contrary to other wishes and if followed consistently leads to inconveniences of the kind to which Mae Enga men submit. High-born girls

GENESIS:
WATER ≡
CHAOS/VOID
LAND ≡
ORDER

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of 17th century Spain found themselves in a dilemma in which dishonour stood on either horn. St. Theresa of Avila was brought up in a society in which the seduction of a girl had to be avenged by her brother or father. So if she received a lover she risked dishonour and the lives of men. But her personal honour required her to be generous and not to withhold herself from her lover, as it was unthinkable to shun lovers altogether. There are many other examples of how the quest for purity creates problems and some curious solutions.

One solution is to enjoy purity at second hand. Something of a vicarious satisfaction gave its aura, no doubt, to the respect for virginity in early Christendom, gives extra zest to the Nambudiri Brahmins when they enclose their sisters, and enhances the prestige of Brahmins among lower castes in general. In certain chiefdoms the Pendé of the Kasai expect their chiefs to live in sexual continence. Thus one man conserves the well-being of the chiefdom on behalf of his polygamous subjects. To ensure no lapse on the part of the chief, who is admittedly past his prime when installed, his subjects fix a penis sheath on him for life (de Sousberghe).

Sometimes the claim to superior purity is based on deceit. The adult men of the Chagga tribe used to pretend that at initiation their anus was blocked for life. Initiated men were supposed never to need to defecate, unlike women and children who remained subject to the exigency of their bodies (Raum). Imagine the complications into which this pretence led Chagga man. The moral of all this is that the facts of existence are a chaotic jumble. If we select from the body's image a few aspects which do not offend, we must be prepared to suffer for the distortion. The body is not a slightly porous jug. To switch the metaphor, a garden is not a tapestry; if all the weeds are removed, the soil is impoverished. Somehow the gardener must preserve fertility by returning what he has taken out. The special kind of treatment which some religions accord to anomalies and abominations to make them powerful for good is like turning weeds and lawn cuttings into compost.

This is the general outline for an answer to why pollutions are often used in renewal rites.

Whenever a strict pattern of purity is imposed on our lives it is either highly uncomfortable or it leads into contradiction if closely followed leads to hypocrisy. That which is negated

is not thereby removed. The rest of life, which does not tidily fit the accepted categories, is still there and demands attention. The body, as we have tried to show, provides a basic scheme for all symbolism. There is hardly any pollution which does not have some primary physiological reference. As life is in the body it cannot be rejected outright. And as life must be affirmed, the most complete philosophies, as William James put it, must find some ultimate way of affirming that which has been rejected.

'If we admit that evil is an essential part of our being and the key to the interpretation of our life, we load ourselves down with a difficulty that has always proved burdensome in philosophies of religion. Theism, wherever it has erected itself into a systematic philosophy of the universe, has shown a reluctance to let God be anything less than All-in-All ... at variance with popular theism (is a philosophy) which is frankly pluralistic ... the universe compounded of many original principles ... God is not necessarily responsible for the existence of evil. The gospel of healthy mindedness casts its vote distinctly for this pluralistic view. Whereas the monistic philosopher finds himself more or less bound to say, as Hegel said, that everything actual is rational, and that evil, as an element dialectically required must be pinned in, and kept and consecrated and have a function awarded to it in the final system of truth, healthy-mindedness refuses to say anything of the sort. Evil, it says, is emphatically irrational, and *not* to be pinned in, or preserved, or consecrated in any final system of truth. It is a pure abomination to the Lord, an alien unreality, a waste element, to be sloughed off and negated ... the ideal, so far from being coextensive with the actual, is a mere extract from the actual, marked by its deliverance from all contact with this diseased, inferior, excrementitious stuff.

Here we have the interesting notion ... of there being elements of the universe which may make no rational whole in conjunction with the other elements, and which, from the point of view of any system which those elements make up, can only be considered so much irrelevance and accident - so much "dirt" as it were, and matter out of place.' (p. 129)

This splendid passage invites us to compare dirt-affirming with dirt-rejecting philosophies. If it were possible to make such

Key for ornament of the world.

Key