

S. J. Tambiah
**THE FORM AND
MEANING OF MAGICAL ACTS:
A POINT OF VIEW**

By drawing on the concrete ethnographic data provided in Evans-Pritchard's famous book, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande* (1937), S. J. Tambiah presents an insightful explication of the logic embedded in magical behavior. His concern is not so much with the specific content of magical spells or rituals as it is with the mode of thought which underlies them. The essay addresses three major points. First, Tambiah emphasizes the similar use of analogy in both scientific and magical thinking but then goes on to make a radical distinction between different ways of using analogy. The scientific use of analogy depends on the causal relationship between objects and their qualities such that predictions can be made from known sets of causal relationships to similar, but unknown sets. In this manner, empirically verifiable hypotheses and comparisons can be generated. Analogy employed in magic, however, depends on a persuasive or evocative transference of the value or meaning implied in one set of relationships to a second set of relationships, although a relation of similarity or causality does not necessarily obtain between these two sets. Magic, Tambiah maintains, is neither simply a science that has failed (as Frazer asserts in his essay in this chapter) nor an incipient "rational" science (as Horton suggests in Chapter Five). Rather, the empirical mode of science and the persuasive, "performative" mode of ritual magic represent two types of thought; the criteria of one cannot—and should not—be applied to the other. Nor is one mode of thought necessarily superior to the other, as Tambiah points out in the second part of his essay. There, he analyzes the "performative" nature of ritual acts and speech, and certain aspects of ordinary language. He borrows Austin's concept of the "performative utterance" to show that *thinking* and *action* are intimately connected not only in ritual or magical behavior but in everyday behavior as well. Making a promise or issuing a command resembles a magical spell in that both rely on the fact that neither merely describes an action. Their very utterance is itself an action which effects a change in the world. It is on these criteria of persuasion, transference, and expansion of meaning that magical acts must be evaluated and analyzed, for it is upon them that the conceived efficacy of such acts rests. For further discussion of the issues raised here, see "The Magical Power of Words" (1968) by S. J. Tambiah, and "It's All Uphill: The Creative Metaphors of Ilongot Magical Spells" (1975) by Michelle Z. Rosaldo.

Finally, Tambiah concludes his essay by addressing the wider implications of his argument. He questions the preconceptions embedded in such categories as "magic," "science," and "religion" which imply that all social and cultural development must necessarily follow that taken to be true for Western Europe: that there is a universal development from magic to religion or from religious mysticism to secular rationality. Tambiah rightly points out that the danger of such facile universalization of our own particular civilization's historical experience lies in its power to distort our perceptions and understanding of other cultures.

INTRODUCTION

Like one of the proverbial blind men who probed different parts of the elephant's body, I shall investigate merely a fragmentary portion of the gigantic question: is there a basic difference in the modes of thought of "traditional pre-scientific" and "modern science-oriented" societies? This was implicitly the theme of Evans-Pritchard's justly famous "dialogue" with Lévy-Bruhl. I shall attempt here only a mini-dialogue with Evans-Pritchard concerning the theoretical implications of his Zande data on magic.

My general thesis will be as follows. The *analogical* mode of thought has always been exploited by man generally. While both "magic" and "science" are characterized by analogical thought and action, they comprise differentiated varieties whose validity it would be inappropriate to measure and verify by the same standards. Magical acts, usually compounded of verbal utterance and object manipulation, constitute "performative" acts by which a property is imperatively transferred to a recipient object or person on an analogical basis. Magical acts are ritual acts, and ritual acts are in turn performative acts whose positive and creative meaning is missed and whose persuasive validity is misjudged if they are subjected to that kind of empirical verification associated with scientific activity. Neither magic nor ritual constitutes applied science in the narrow sense.

In contrast, the exploitation of analogical thought in science consists in making the known or apprehended instance serve as a model for the incompletely known in the phenomenon to be explained. The model serves to generate a prediction concerning the explicandum, which is then subject to observation and verification tests to ascertain the prediction's truth value.

Now "performative" acts of a persuasive kind are by no means confined to the primitive: modern industrial societies also have their rites and ceremonies which achieve their effects by virtue of conventional normative understandings. However, science

(strictly defined) is an achievement perhaps only of certain complex and literate civilizations: in the West at least where it has attained its fullest development, science probably developed and differentiated out of certain forms of traditional and magical thought and activity, but this should not automatically serve as a universal linear scheme, nor should there be a retrospective and backward thrust by which the "rationality" of magic is pitted against the "rationality" of science, to the former's inevitable and foregone detriment. Indeed it is precisely because many Western anthropologists have approached the ritual performances of other societies from the perspective of their own historical experience and intellectual categories that they have misunderstood the semantic basis of magical acts. . . .

... [Although Evans-Pritchard subjected Zande magic and witchcraft to the westerner's criteria of scientific induction and verification,] fresh insights break through here and there in [his book *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (1937).] One such is contained in the passing phrase "imitative symbolism," and another in the idea of "homoeopathy," once again discussed briefly in two pages (pp. 449-450). Here we find the seeds of an approach to Zande magic (and indeed other magical systems) which I shall call "analogical action."

Apparently the Azande themselves recognized the analogical and metaphorical basis for the use of material substances in their rites. . . . Evans-Pritchard writes:

They (the Azande) say, "We use such-and-such a plant because it is like such-and-such a thing," naming the object towards which the rite is directed. Likewise they say, "We do so-and-so in order that so-and-so may happen," naming the action which they wish to follow. Often the similarity between medicine and desired happening is indicated in the spell.¹

Evans-Pritchard proceeds to give the example (which he also gave in 1929) of the tall bingba grass, which is profuse in growth and has featherlike branches, being used by ver-

¹ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*, p. 449.

bal direction and by direct action to make the oil-bearing melon (*kpagu*) flourish.

There are many examples of analogical action in word and deed scattered throughout the book. A systematic assembling and examination of these examples may provide an alternative interpretation to the one proposed by Evans-Pritchard.

Scrutinize these preliminary examples with this objective in view:

1. When the Azande prick the stalks of bananas with crocodiles' teeth they say "Teeth of crocodile are you, I prick bananas with them, may bananas be prolific like crocodiles' teeth."
2. Azande tie *gbaga* (the fruit of a palm tree) to their girdles as a medicine of masculinity and to secure sexual potency. When tying they say: "You are *gbaga*. May I be very potent sexually. May I not become sexually weak. . . ."
3. Here is an expressive example that could equally well come from Ceylon or Thailand: If a man is a victim of *menzere* (sorcery) medicine, he goes to a much-frequented cross-roads, kneels there and verbally disperses it: ". . . If it is *menzere* may it follow all paths and not return."
4. Finally, there is the celebrated case of the stone placed in the fork of a tree to retard the sun: "You stone, may the sun not be quick to fall today. You stone, retard the sun on high so that I can arrive first at that homestead to which I journey, then the sun may set."

Note here that the Azande refer to the stone used as *ngua uru* which Evans-Pritchard translates as "sun-medicine."

It is my submission that, had Evans-Pritchard followed leads of this sort, he could have thrown more light on why within the range of plant life and arboreal substances (which form the major category of "medicines") used by the Azande, certain woods or roots or leaves rather than others were chosen to represent specialized ideas. Furthermore, the utterances and spells are in fact, as we have seen in these examples, critical for telling us which feature of an object-symbol is the focus of attention on an analogical basis. A shift of theoretical interest from "inherent potency" of medicines to "analogical transfer of their qualities" might have made the botanical enumeration of Zande medicines not so tedious and unnecessary as Evans-Pritchard feared.

Here is a critical passage which we may take as the text for our discussion in that it encapsulates the "closed" system of Zande thought, a central theme of the book (and grist for the Popperian mill):

I do not know whether more than a verbal analogy is implied in the Zande name for mumps (the affected parts are massaged with an unguent): imawirianzoro, sickness of the little (wiri) anzoro

birds (finches) which have lumps on their necks. But it may well be so, for we know that its primitive patterns of thought objects which have a superficial resemblance are often linked up by nomenclature and ritual and are connected in mystical patterns of thought. In Zande therapeutics this mystical connexion is found in notions about cause and cure. Ringworm resembles in appearance fowls' excrement, and fowls' excrement is at the same time both cause and cure of ringworm. Blepharoptosis resembles a hen's egg, and a hen's egg is its cure. Generally the logic of therapeutic treatment consists in the selection of the most prominent external symptoms, the naming of the disease after some object in nature which it resembles, and the utilization of the object as the principal ingredient in the drug administered to cure the disease. The circle may even be completed by belief that the symptoms not only yield to treatment by the object which resembles them but are caused by it as well.

A number of words appear in this commentary that are worthy of "practical criticism": "superficial resemblance" can get its meaning only by unstated comparison with the notion of deeper identity from a scientific causal viewpoint; "mystical connection" can only mean unobservable and unknown connection by comparison with empirically observable connection. The backdrop then is the standards of verification of science. . . .

. . . [Let] us examine carefully the kinds of analogies that exist and their uses. First of all what do we mean by analogy? Basically analogy depends on the recognition of similarities between the instances compared, and, as many philosophers have recognized, analogy stands as a prototype of reasoning from experience. J. S. Mill's paradigm serves well as a definition: "two things resemble each other in one or more respects; a certain proposition is true of the one; therefore it is true of the other." Lloyd elucidating Keynes's thinking on the subject (in *A treatise on probability*) remarks that "both Bacon's own inductive method, based on the use of 'exclusions and rejections,' and Mill's Methods of Agreement and Difference, aim at the determination of the resemblances and differences between particular instances, at the determination of what Keynes called the Positive and Negative Analogies."²

Hesse in an instructive essay,³ on which I draw, lists four kinds of analogies. For my purposes, I shall modify her examples, and elaborate in new directions fundamentally two types of analogy—the scientific predic-

² Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Greek Thought*, University Press, Cambridge, 1966, p. 173.

³ M. B. Hesse, *Models and analogies in science*, Newman History and Philosophy and Science series, 14, Sheed and Ward, London, 1963.

Figure 1

SIMILARITY RELATIONS	
CAUSAL RELATIONS	<i>Properties of sound</i>
	<i>Properties of light</i>
	echoes loudness pitch etc. reflection brightness colour

Figure 2

SIMILARITIES	
CO-OCCURRENCE	<i>Bird</i>
	<i>Fish</i>
	wing lungs feathers fin gill scales

tive and the conventional persuasive. First, let us bear in mind that "positive analogy" relates to properties shared or points of similarity between the things compared, "negative" analogy to their points of difference or properties they do not share, and "neutral analogy" to properties of the things compared of which we do not yet know whether they are of positive or negative character.

Of the two fundamentally different types of analogies that can be distinguished, one serves as a model in science generating hypotheses and comparisons which are then subject to verification inductively. In this use, the known or apprehended instance serves as the "model" and the unknown or incompletely known is the explicandum, the phenomenon to be explained by means of a theory.

Let us take some examples of analogies that might be used in science [see Figure 1]. In this analogy, following Hesse, I indicate two kinds of dyadic relations that should be recognized, the horizontal and vertical relations. If it is to serve as a material analogy in science, the pairs of horizontal terms (echoes: reflection, etc.) should be either identical or similar, and the vertical relations (between the properties of sound such as echoes, loudness, etc.) should be "causal," which term given a wide interpretation should mean at least a tendency to co-occurrence, in that certain properties are necessary or sufficient conditions for the occurrence of other properties.

In the second "looser" example given [in Figure 2] the horizontal relation may show similarities of structure or of function, and the vertical relation that of whole to its parts depending on some theory of inter-relation of parts, evolutionary or adaptive.

Now it is essential to note that analogies can usefully serve as theoretical models only if the horizontal dyadic relations are relations of similarity (i.e. judged by identities

and differences), if the vertical relations of the model are causal in some scientifically acceptable sense and if those of the explicandum also promise relations of the same kind, and if the essential properties and causal relations of the model have not been shown to be part of the negative analogy between model and explicandum. If these conditions are satisfied then predictions can legitimately be made from any set of known, say three, terms to an unknown fourth. For example, in the case of the sound and light analogies stated before, if we have established the similarity of "echoes" to "reflection," then from the known property of "loudness" in sound we may expect to find the "similar" property of "brightness" in light. Or in the bird and fish analogy, one can predict from the known parts of the bird skeleton to a "missing" part of the fish skeleton. To put it differently, the fun lies in extrapolating from the domain of positive analogy into the domain of neutral analogy as these were defined above. Ultimately of course these predictions should be capable of verification or falsification in terms of observation statements.

There is another kind of traditional analogy used widely in human discourse that does not owe its genesis and use to the pursuit of "scientific" knowledge. It would

therefore be ridiculous to weigh and measure its adequacy in terms of inductive verification. Consider the following analogy that may occur in political rhetoric: the employer is to his workers as a father is to his children.

father	employer
children	workers

Let us say that the purpose of this analogy is propagandist, that it is disseminated by employers in order to "evoke" attitudes in workers rather than to "predict" them.

Now, it should be noted that in this example the vertical relations are not specifically causal; nor is it necessary that if three terms occur, the fourth also must. Even more importantly, there is not in this example any horizontal relation of similarity between the terms, except in virtue of the fact that the two pairs are up to a point related by the same vertical relation. (There may be other persuasive analogies in which, in spite of horizontal similarities between terms, the critical relation is still the vertical one.)

How must this analogy work if it is to succeed as political rhetoric? The relation of father to children bears some relation of employer to workers (positive analogy) in the sense let us say that just as the father provides for the material needs of his children so does the employer provide work and wages for his workers. Let us next say that the relation of children to father (and vice versa) is much more than this dependence; children should love their father, obey and respect him and so on. These meanings are not necessarily implied in the employer-worker relation (negative analogy). It is precisely this expansion of meaning or the transfer of these additional values to the employer-worker relations that is sought by invoking the father-children analogy. Since in this case the ultimate aim is to make the workers believe that they are like "children," there is a sense in which we can say that the operation consists in "transferring" (rather than "predicting") from the postulated three terms, the value of "children" to the fourth term, the "workers." It is for this reason that this analogy and its variants are labelled "persuasive," "rationalizing" or "evocative."

It is my thesis that in ritual operations by word and object manipulation, the analogical action conforms to the "persuasive" rather than the "scientific" model. I shall later illustrate the argument that in Zande rites (as well as those of many other societies) the operation rests on the explicit recognition of both similarity (positive analogy) and difference (negative analogy) between the vertical

relations of the paired terms. And the rite consists in persuasively transferring the properties of the desired and desirable vertical relation to the other which is in an undesirable condition, or in attempting to convert a potential not-yet-achieved state into an actualized one. The manipulation is made operationally realistic by directing the transfer not only by word but, as in the Zande case, by bringing a material piece of the object in the desirable-desired analogy into contact with the object in need of the transfer. There are nuances in this basic manipulation which are best illustrated when dealing with the concrete cases.

Thus a vital difference exists between the use of "analogy" in science and ritual. Barring a few instances, in most Zande magical rites (especially those considered important by the people concerned), the analogical relation or comparison and the wished-for effect is stated verbally simultaneously with or before the carrying out of the so-called "homoeopathic" act (of influencing certain objects by manipulating other objects which resemble them). Why must the analogy of attraction be stated in word and deed for it to be effective? No classical philosopher or historian of science appears to have asked this when propounding that the principle of "like attracts like" activated primitive thought and action. In a laboratory of today, the only time a scientist may be found to foretell and verbally explain his actions while simultaneously doing his experiment would be, for example, when he is teaching a class the procedure involved in conducting that experiment. (And of course he does not expect that his words will automatically make the experiment come out right, as we know from the failed experiments in science classes we have attended in school.) Outside some such situation, his sanity would be suspect if he gave instructions aloud to his apparatus to do his bidding.

Note also how extraordinary the magical operation must look in terms of the traditional explanation (of like attracts like) when placed in relation to the use of analogy made by a scientist. Supposing a scientist constructs an electronic brain-model to "simulate" in some ways a human biochemically structured brain. The former is useful as a predictive model only in those areas where the material make-up of the analogue is not essential to the model (i.e. constitutes the innocuous negative analogy) but where the pattern of mutual relation of the parts and the behavioural relations expressed by it are the essential features. If, say, a man is weak in arithmetic the scientist does not bring a

brain-model that can add and place it in contact with the head of the former so that his additions may be thus "caused" to be correct. But this is precisely what we are told the primitive magician might attempt to do! (On the other hand the scientist may demonstrate the working of an adding machine to our hypothetical subject, and it is possible that after sufficient demonstration of its workings his abilities might increase. This is a technique of "persuasion" through contact. Could it be that this is the logic of the magical operations as well ... ?)

SOME ZANDE ANALOGIES

We have already noted that for the first time, well towards the end of the Azande book, Evans-Pritchard broached the question of the analogical basis of magical rites as seen by the actors. It is however a pity that he did not compile a more thorough indigenous exegesis on why certain "medicines" were used, and what properties or features of the substance used were singled out as "similar" to those of the recipient of the rite. Hence in the examples he cryptically cites, the logic of their use is open to an alternative interpretation that is as plausible as Evans-Pritchard's own implicitly theory-dictated view that the medicines and drugs, chosen on the basis of superficial resemblances and to which is given mystical significance, are empirically ineffective and scientifically false, although used as if they had automatic effects. Let us look at some Zande cases:

1. At a certain time of their growth the

stems of the creeper *araka* lose their leaves. These are replaced by a double row of bands, joined to the stalks, which little by little dry, split, and fall in small pieces just as the extremities of the hands and feet disappear in "*la lépre mutilante*." This creeper is highly thought of as furnishing treatment for this kind of leprosy.

I suggest that the analogical reasoning in this example [see Figure 3] is more complex than is implied by a simplistic "like attracts like" in that it brings to view both similarities and differences, positive and negative analogies, in the vertical relations of the terms. In the case of the creeper, the falling of its extremities is a phase of its growth cycle, whereas in the case of human beings the decay of limbs through leprosy is a disease that leads to degeneration and death. Thus this comparison proceeds to use the *araka* creeper in the rite as a vehicle or agent of life, the message being: may the leprosy disappear and health appear, just as the shedding process in the creeper stimulates growth. The rite expresses the wish that one "vertical" relation that is undesired be replaced by another desired one; it itself represents symbolic not causal action.

2. Let us next take the celebrated example already cited of a man indulging "in the action of placing a stone in the tree and relating by a few words this action to a desired end [see Figure 4]." We should bear in mind that the man is on a journey and wishes to arrive home before sunset.

We can plausibly say that here the initial

Figure 3

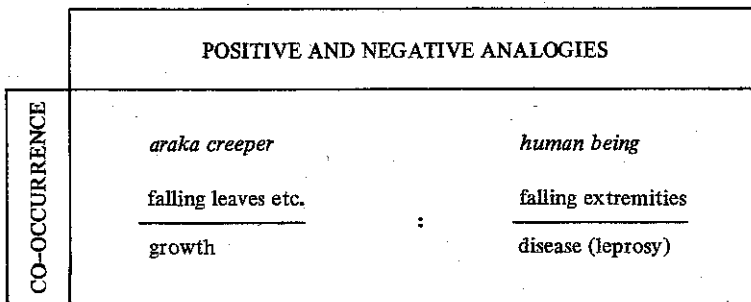
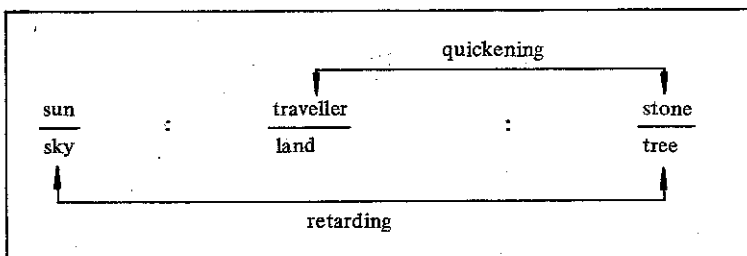


Figure 4



comparison is between the sun "travelling" towards sunset (in the sky) and a man travelling (on land) to his homestead. The sun and the man are therefore similar in their situations but their interests are not identical (the difference that constitutes the negative analogy). The man wishes to travel faster than the sun. It is in this context that we must view the operation of putting a stone in the fork of a tree and thus wedging it. It represents the desired positive effect of retarding the sun and the implicit counter effect (or negative analogy) of quickening his footsteps home, which in fact the traveller actually does by performing this rite.

3. To examine now a case of "homeopathic" treatment of a disease [Figure 5]. Ringworm in children is called *imanduruakondo* (*ima* = sickness, *nduruakondo* = fowl house).

It is so called because the scabby patches of the disease resemble fowls' excrement: hence they appear to consider the disease due to the afflicted child having eaten food grown on a dung heap in the vicinity of a fowl house: hence also they consider the remedy to consist in fowls' excrement dried and reduced to ashes and mixed into a paste with a little palm-oil and applied to the ringworm.

While the "like attracts like" argument would say that the fowls' excrement is (falsely) used to attract the scabs on the skin which it (falsely) resembles, I am tempted to say that the analogy is interesting and is capable of being acted upon creatively because, once again, of the positive and negative features it exhibits. The relation of fowl to excrement is one of *elimination* of (unwanted) waste product, while that of scabby skin on child is one of (unwanted) *adherence* to body. Hence it is that the fowl's excrement can convey the desired idea of eliminating the scabs when applied to the body, because while in one sense similar to it, it is also essentially different. . . .

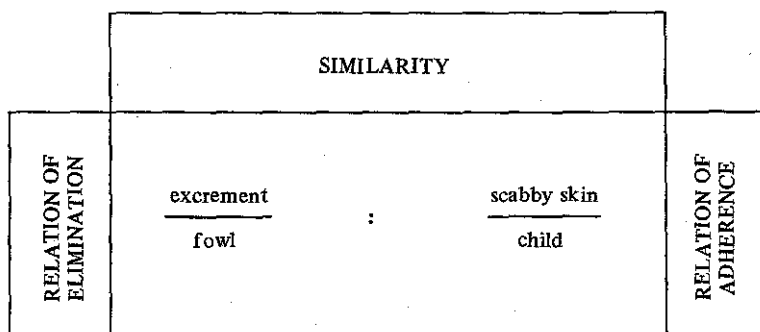
Enough Zande examples have been given

to suggest how the analogical thought and action of the persuasive types are exploited. A well-known example such as the cure of elephantiasis by the use of ashes from a piece of burnt elephant's leg looks much less bizarre when subjected to similar analysis. Nor is this underlying logic peculiar to the Azande. Numerous cases were documented by Malinowski: one example that neatly illustrates analogical action is that in which the Trobrianders, having postulated an analogy (or homology) between the yam house with yams stored in it and the human belly with food inside it, act upon the former in order to influence the latter. "The Trobriand logic is that the rite is really a metaphorical analogy urging the human belly to restrain its hunger and greed for food." The application of "similarity and difference" analogically also serves to unravel the logic of some Trobriand food taboos. . . .

HOW TO UNDERSTAND RITUAL (WHICH INCLUDES "MAGIC"?)

I have perhaps so far only indicated negatively how "magic" should not be viewed and not positively how it might be viewed in terms of a new perspective. I have argued that to view magic as an attempt at science that failed (or more crudely a "bastard science" in the manner of Frazer, or more sophisticatedly as a "closed" system of thought that allows for no verification and falsification of its principles à la Popper) is to assert that in their magic and ritual the primitives tried to achieve results through "causal" reasoning and failed. I have also argued that while it is the case that much primitive magic is based on analogical thought and action as is Western science, the difference between them is that whereas in science the use of an analogy is closely linked to prediction and verification, and its adequacy judged in terms of inductive support, or of meeting standards of probability criteria, or standing up to tests of falsifiability

Figure 5



and the like, the semantics of a magical rite are not necessarily to be judged in terms of such "true/false" criteria of science but on different standards and objectives. The corresponding objectives in (magical) ritual are "persuasion," "conceptualization," "expansion of meaning" and the like, and the criteria of adequacy are better conveyed by notions such as "validity," "correctness," "legitimacy," and "felicity" of the ceremony performed.

It is this latter assertion that I wish to elucidate now. In my essay on "The Magical Power of Words"⁴ I took some steps towards understanding the form and meaning of ritual in terms of its inner semantic frame and outer pragmatic frame. My starting point with regard to the former was that most "magical rites" (as indeed most rituals) combine word and deed and that the rite is devoted to an "imperative transfer" of effects, which some might phrase as the "telic" and others as the "illocutionary" or "performative" nature of the rite. The semantics of the transfer itself, the logic of construction of the transfer, in the Trobriand case depends on (1) metaphorical and analogical transfers by word mediated by realistic contact transfer through objects used as "transformers," and (2) on imperative verbal transfer of energy to a "whole" through the metonymical naming of the parts. One of the points I made was that the same laws of association that apply to ordinary language apply to magical language. . . .

In Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* the chief topic of elaboration is what he calls the "performative" or "illocutionary" act, in which the uttering of the sentence cannot merely be described as saying something, but is, or is a part of, the *doing of an action*. When in a marriage ceremony the man says "I do take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife" (or some such formula), or the man says in a will "I give and bequeath . . .," to utter these sentences in the appropriate circumstances "is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state I am doing it: it is to do it."

What ultimately I think Austin arrives at towards the end of his exercise is a classification of speech acts, "the issuing of utterances in a speech situation," which makes any stating "performing an act."

. . . How many senses may there be in which to say something is to do something, or in saying something we do something, or even by saying something we do something?

The following classification of speech acts may help to answer the question:

1. to perform a *locutionary* act: to utter a sentence with a certain sense and reference (an assertion, a descriptive statement of fact) which is true or false in a referential sense.
2. to perform an *illocutionary* act: this relates to an utterance which has a certain conventional force, a performative act which does something (as implied in promising, ordering, apologizing, warning etc.). Usually the explicit illocutionary utterance is reducible or analysable into a form with a verb in the first person singular present indicative active (i.e. the "I," the "active" and the "present" seem appropriate). These statements cannot be subject to the true-false test, but are *normatively judged* as "happy"/"unhappy," valid/invalid, correct/ defective etc.
3. to perform a *perlocutionary* act: this refers to what we bring about or achieve by saying something (as connoted by convincing, persuading, misleading etc.). It refers to both the intended and unintended consequence upon the hearer of words uttered by the speaker. (By saying it I convinced him . . .)

These three are analytically separate but in reality not exclusive categories: both locutionary and illocutionary acts can have consequences listed as perlocutionary; and an illocutionary act can have referring and predicating elements together with the performative. We could perhaps say that an imperative illocutionary act attempts to get the world to conform to words, whereas "true" when ascribed to illocutions attributes success in getting words to conform to the world.

Now adapting these ideas for our purposes, we can say that ritual acts and magical rites are of the "illocutionary" or "performative" sort, which simply by virtue of being enacted (under the appropriate conditions) achieve a change of state, or do something effective (e.g. an installation ceremony undergone by the candidate makes him a "chief"). This performative aspect of the rite should be distinguished from its locutionary (referential, information-carrying) and perlocutionary (consequences for the participants) features.

It was quite evident to Austin that, while he focuses on the role of speech in illocutionary acts, the utterance was not the sole thing necessary if the illocutionary act was to be deemed to have been performed, and also that actions other than speech whether physical or mental were entailed for the full realization of the performance. Indeed it is even possible at the other extreme to enact a performative act without uttering words at all—a hypothetical example would be the establishing of blood brotherhood by the

physical exchange of blood (without an exchange of words).

The vast majority of ritual and magical acts combine word and deed. Hence it is appropriate to say that they use words in a performative or illocutionary manner, just as the action (the manipulation of objects and persons) is correspondingly performative.

I shall attempt to formalize in a few words the essentials of what I see as the form and meaning of magical ritual acts. The rite usually consists of a close interweaving of speech (in the form of utterances and spells) and action (consisting of the manipulation of objects). The utterance can be analysed with respect to its "predicative" and "illocutionary" frames. In terms of predication and reference the words exploit analogical associations, comparisons and transfers (through simile, metaphor, metonym etc.) The illocutionary force and power by which the deed is directed and enacted is achieved through use of words commanding, ordering, persuading and the like: "Whistle, whistle, I send you after a thief . . .," so commands an Azande spell. . . .

The action can be similarly analysed. The objects manipulated are chosen analogically on the basis of similarity and difference to convey meaning. From the performative perspective, the action consists of an operation done on an object-symbol to make an imperative and realistic transfer of its properties to the recipient. Or to put it differently, two objects are seen as having resemblances and differences, and an attempt is made to transfer the desirable quality of one to the other which is in a defective state.

Now it is clear that the words and action closely combine to form an amalgam which is the magical or ritual act. The interrelation between the two media—speech and object manipulation—can take different forms. What I want to emphasize here is that this way of looking at "magical art" breaks through the Saussurean *langue/parole* distinction. On the one hand, the magical act bears predicative and referential *langue*-type meanings and on the other it is a performative act. Both frames are co-existent, and it is as a performative or "illocutionary" act directed by analogical reasoning that magic gets its distinctiveness.

Now it is inappropriate to subject these performative rites to verification, to test whether they are true or false in a referential or assertive sense or whether the act has effected a result in terms of the logic of "causation" as this is understood in science. Let me illustrate the point by considering the

Thai rite of blessing a new house by Buddhist monks (so that evil spirits may be driven out and prosperity result) through the recitation of sacred verses and the performance of certain acts. Several conditions have to be satisfied if a performance of this rite is not, to use Austin's word, to become an "infelicity": that there exists a conventional procedure properly enacted only by authorized persons, e.g. monks, householders etc.; that, in this particular instance, the monks who took part were entitled to conduct the ceremony, and that the actual ceremony was executed both correctly and completely.

Quite another set of conditions relates to the *bona fides* of the actors. For example, the rite is intended for beneficiaries who expect to conduct themselves in certain ways and who have the right intentions. In fulfilment of this, it is necessary that the participants, in the actual rite performed, satisfy these expectations and actually so conduct themselves subsequently.

Now suppose that after the performance of the rite it is found that one or more of these conditions were not fulfilled—the monks may have been bogus, the ceremony incorrectly performed, or the householder never intended to live in the house with his family but planned to use it for an illicit purpose—we cannot in these circumstances say that the rite itself was false or empirically ineffective in a causal sense. The ceremony itself cannot ever be said to have been proved to be false or untrue or ineffective; however, any particular enactment of it may be said to be void, unworthy or defective. A bigamist who on false pretences has gone through a second marriage ceremony, does not on that account make the institution of marriage false, wrong or ineffective; what can be said is that he has undergone the ceremony in bad faith and that he has not properly "married" a second time.

The conclusions therefore are that (1) while to particular instances of ritual enactments of the illocutionary or performative type *normative* judgements of efficacy (legitimacy, defectiveness, propriety, etc.) may be applied, it is inappropriate to judge their efficacy in terms of *verification statements* and inductive rules, and (2) while ritual in general as an institution cannot be declared to be defective, particular instances of it may be so declared, if the proper conditions of performance were not met. It is at this point that I wish to join issue with Evans-Pritchard first and then Robin Horton afterwards.

Evans-Pritchard in his classic study of Zande witchcraft, oracles and magic, having

elucidated the coherence and close linkage of these systems of belief, felt it necessary to ask how they fitted into the observer-imposed ritual/empirical categories and how they related to Zande "practical" day-to-day activity. More pointedly, Evans-Pritchard, naturally interested in a "European" intellectual problem, asked how magic, which was oriented to achieving effects, compared with Western empiricism based on canons of proof and experimentation. Evans-Pritchard gave various reasons why the Azande did not disbelieve in magic even when the expected or wished-for magical effect did not materialize. His answer was that although Azande may be sceptical about the skills and knowledge of particular witch doctors or their poor medicines or the correct performance of particular performances, and the like, their belief in the efficacy of the system itself was not thereby assailed. Now, whereas Evans-Pritchard gave this as evidence of why Zande magic cannot be empirically proven wrong, he did not perhaps fully appreciate that the answers he received were appropriate to all conventional performative and illocutionary acts—particular performances may for various reasons be "unhappy" or "incorrect" and therefore inefficacious while the convention itself is unassailable.

Robin Horton compounds the "error" in his challenging essays, suggestively entitled "African Traditional Thought and Western Science."⁵ On the one hand Horton argues that African traditional thought (with its supernatural entities couched in a personal idiom) and Western science (with its concepts couched in an impersonal idiom) are similar in that reference to theoretical entities is used to link events in the visible, tangible world (natural effects) to their antecedents in the same world (natural causes). On the other hand, however—and here is the sting—this same African thought-system whose aim is explanatory and predictive (just like science) refuses to subject itself (like good science) to falsifiability and other verification tests. Indeed African traditional thought (just as Evans-Pritchard elucidated it) is a "closed system"; the believer cannot get outside the web of his thought, he cannot be agnostic, there is no vision of alternatives; furthermore it portrays unreflective thinking, i.e. traditional thought lacks logic and philosophy and reflection upon the rules of explanation. Evans-Pritchard's demonstration is driven home in traditional thought by a process of *secondary elaboration*; other current

beliefs are utilized in such a way as to "excuse" each failure as it occurs and thus the major theoretical assumptions are protected even in the face of negative evidence. By comparison the collective memory of the European scientific community is littered with the wreckage of discarded theories... true, but Horton's enthusiasm for Popper's idealizations may benefit from some of Kuhn's scepticism.

I think it is possible to differ from Horton on the basic assumptions of the comparisons between traditional and scientific thought. One does not deny that traditional societies reflect the patterns he enumerates. But I think it is fundamentally mistaken to say that African religion and ritual are concerned with the same intellectual tasks that science in Western society is concerned with: this is a case of analogy abused. The net result of such comparative pursuit is to land oneself where Frazer found himself—magical rituals are like science with the difference that they are mistaken and false.

My counter-argument is that to view most ritual and magical acts as if they were directed to the purposes of scientific activity—to discover natural causes, predict empirical consequences in terms of a theory of causation—is inappropriate and not productive of maximum understanding. Analogical thought of Western science and of primitive ritual have different implications. Like "illocutionary" and "performative" acts ritual acts have consequences, effect changes, structure situations not in the idiom of "Western science" and "rationality" but in terms of convention and normative judgement, and as solutions of existential problems and intellectual puzzles. These orders of thought and action after all are to be found in Western societies as well—they co-exist with science and thrive outside its field of action or relevance. (It would be interesting to know what Horton thinks is the relation between science and religion in Western society.)

But returning to the problem of magic itself: have I merely evaded answering what magic is by embedding it in ritual and seeing it as an analogical cum performative act? By and large I think this is a correct representation of it. But I must also go on to say that in so far as magical rites try to effect a transfer they are often geared to achieving practical results—such as cure of disease or production of a fine harvest, etc.—as much as they are geared to effecting social results. Although we should not judge their *raison d'être* in terms of applied science, we should however recognize that many (but not all)

⁵ *Africa*, 37, 1967.

magical rites are elaborated and utilized precisely in those circumstances where non-Western man has not achieved that special kind of "advanced" scientific knowledge which can control and act upon reality to an extent that reaches beyond the realm of his own practical knowledge. Let us not forget what Evans-Pritchard's conclusion was. Zande rites were most "mystical" where the diseases they dealt with were the most acute and chronic. These rites then are on a different wave length from scientific technology; or at least in primitive societies it is better to assimilate witchcraft and magic to "ritual" rather than to "applied science."

Let us also not forget one of Evans-Pritchard's most pregnant observations, that the Zande belief in witchcraft does not exclude "empirical knowledge of cause and effect" but that it provides a social and cultural method of acting upon the world: "In every case witchcraft is the socially relevant cause, since it is the only one which *allows intervention* and determines social behaviour.⁶ Thus through ritual man imposes meaning on the world, anticipates the future, retrospectively "rationalizes" the past and effects results.

It is perhaps because magic and applied science are so to say on different wave lengths, yet may (partially) overlap over the ground they cover, that the results of the spread of modern science and technology in so-called "traditional" societies are complex, inconsistent and non-linear. An effective pesticide may over time render a "magical rite" for killing pests redundant and unnecessary. But a sacrifice which creates the cosmos persists because it "creates" the world in a sense that is different from that known in the laboratory. How does one understand the Hindu theory of sacrifice which asserts claims vaster than the causal act itself? And

in the new urban communities of developing societies, "drugs" may replace traditional "medicines," but scientific "scepticism" and "prediction" do not replace astrology, or consulting of oracles or of diviners, for the guidance of human actions and for providing meaning in perplexing situations.

But what may be true of non-Western societies may not be true of Western civilization in its recent past. . . .

We should heed this warning in our comparative studies. By simply naming rituals of non-Western societies as "magic," and the substances they use as "medicines" and "drugs," we cannot thereby attribute to the phenomena so named, by virtue of that naming, characteristics that may be peculiar to one's own contemporary civilization. It is only a short step from here to go on to measure these same ritual practices and ideas as equivalent to, but of course misguided and falling short of, empirical science. It is not that such a perspective is wrong but that it may hide from view the positive, persuasive and creative, though "non-scientific," features of analogical thought and action expressed in magical rites. The dangers of excessive historical universalization should be kept in view. The rise of industry, capitalism and experimental science in Europe in recent centuries found its counterpart in sociological theorizing in Weber's doctrine of growing "rationality" and "rationalization" in Western civilization—an inevitable historical process towards efficiency of social forms like bureaucracy, towards pragmatic orientation whereby means were closely linked to ends, and towards the generation of context-free, neutral and universal constructs and principles. I am merely indicating that this is a particular historical experience which need not and should not be universalized if it entails automatic projections of how things traditional inevitably become things rational.

⁶ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic* . . . , p. 73 (my italics, S.J.T.).