

SELF : PUBLIC, PRIVATE  
SOME AFRICAN REPRESENTATIONS<sup>1</sup>

At the very beginning of Lévy-Bruhl's book *L'Ame Primitive* (1927) (translated as *The 'Soul' of the Primitive*, and those inverted commas round *Soul* mark it as an area of the translator's uncertainty), he took it for granted that his 'primitives' would be confused if asked about those aspects of themselves which now concern us:

It is scarcely likely that primitives have ever given a form, however indefinite, to the more or less implicit ideas they have of their own personality. At any rate it would be quite useless to question them about it, for ambiguity and misunderstanding would be the only result.

He suggests that his readers, by contrast, would have more clearly formulated answers ready. Yet in the year in which *L'Ame Primitive* was published, Aldous Huxley, reflecting on Proust's phrase 'the intermittence of the heart', observed that:

The number of completely unified personalities is small. Most of us go through life incompletely unified, - part person, the rest a mere collection of discontinuous psychological elements.

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<sup>1</sup> Text of a Lecture given at Wolfson College, Oxford, on 11 June 1980, as part of a series, 'The Category of the Person', organised by Michael Carrithers and Steven Collins on the subject of the Lecture given by Marcel Mauss, 'Une Catégorie de l'Esprit Humain: La Notion de Personne, celle de "MOI"' (*Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1938). The present paper may appear in modified form in a forthcoming collection based on the series.

And Ouspensky of course had gone much further. In a lecture given in 1922 he is reported on as follows:

... Man misunderstood himself: he thought he had a permanent self, a master "I", which integrated and controlled his thoughts and actions. But this was an illusion. Instead of the single "I" there were innumerable "I"s, many of which said contradictory things. Then Ouspensky got up and drew a circle on the blackboard, and divided it by criss-cross lines until it looked like a fly's eye seen under a microscope. In each little space he put an "I", and said "this is a picture of Man".

Academically more central though, and nearer to our own time, place and intellectual habits, the Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy in Oxford, Gilbert Ryle, reflected in *The Concept of Mind* on the 'enigmas ... which all turn on what I shall call the systematic elusiveness of the concept of "I"'. It was ultimately this elusive 'I' which St. Augustine in the *Confessions* sought in God, and which Mauss in 'L'Idée du Moi' sought in a history of Man's self-image.

Early in his essay, Mauss distinguishes his own investigation - 'entirely one of law and morality', he says - from those of contemporaneous linguists and psychologists. 'In no sense do I maintain', he wrote for the linguists,

that there has ever been a tribe or language in which the word *je-moi* (I-me or self: you will see in France that we still decline it in two words) did not exist, and did not express something clearly represented ....

In that seemingly casual aside - 'I-Me or self: you will see that in France we still decline it in two words' - he allows for subtle difficulties of translation, and hints, perhaps, that some languages have been better equipped than others for making the particular moral, philosophical, legal and theological distinctions which then interested him. In relation to academic psychology he added:

I shall ignore everything about the "self", the conscious personality as such. I shall say simply: it is clear, above all to us, that there has never been a human being without a sense not only of his own body but of his simultaneously mental and physical individuality ....

Indeed there is much more to the idea of the self than Western ideas of legal and moral personality; and I do not think that ideas of the self can be so readily separated from the sense of simultaneously mental and physical individuality as Mauss's purpose then required. The 'average', 'archaic' or 'total' man, as Mauss called those outside the academically educated classes of modern society (and from whom he thought those educated classes had much to learn), does not think about himself as though he were examining an intellectual construct; and even that sense of mental and physical individuality appears to be dissolved or surrendered

in trances, mystical experiences, spirit possession and contemplative prayer; and even those who have had none of these experiences may have had, in dreams, some intuition of the transformation of the self - of 'the conscious personality' - those experiences are said to involve. Certainly, to consider African ideas of the 'I', we have to begin by allowing 'the self' to be more labile than are the ideas of it in Mauss's essay.

Let us take our bearings, then, not from Mauss but from African forms of self-expression not elicited by questions put by foreign observers in a foreign philosophical and psychological idiom. Here is a summary of a West African, most probably Yoruba, folktale:

The king invited the animals to a great feast, and offered a prize to the best dancer. The animals danced energetically before him, each showing off its own most striking qualities - the elephant its grave dignity, the leopard its beautiful coat and sinuous agility, the gazelle its spectacular leaps and so forth. When, at the end of the dance, they gathered around the king to hear his judgment, to their surprise and displeasure he awarded the prize to the tortoise. Answering their complaints, the king asked them who had provided the feast, and who was giving the prize, to which they could only reply "It is you, O king!". "And so it is that I award the prize to the tortoise", said the king, "for it is only I who can see the dance of the tortoise: his dance is entirely inside him".

In much West African folklore, the tortoise represents intelligence, resourcefulness, trickery and luck. Thus for those who tell this tale, the success of the slow, ungainly tortoise is an extreme example of the deceptiveness of outward appearances, though the moral is not that hidden intellectual agility is preferred, as such, to physical display: both are parts of the dance. The tortoise too, now public and exposed, now withdrawn and hidden, is a fitting and subtle image for the self.

Otherwise the story is immediately comprehensible without anthropological or literary comment to any thoughtful child; and since folktales in Africa as elsewhere contribute to the education of children, it may be assumed that from childhood the Yoruba are not only supposed to have an idea of a hidden, private self - here an inner *activity*, you will have noted - but to understand that it may ultimately be more important than the outer activity, the *persona*, or mask, in Mauss's terms, presented to others. There are many other African stories about tricksters - the spider, the hare and others besides the tortoise - who often admirably succeed, but sometimes ludicrously fail, by being, as we might say, 'all out for themselves'.

I emphasize this because much of what has been written about African ideas of self, rightly putting to the fore the importance of a person's group and status - the public self - for defining what and who he or she is, can deflect interest from this African

concern, also, on occasion, with individuals as individuals. Professor John Beattie has drawn my attention to what Burckhardt wrote about pre-Renaissance man in Europe in this connection: 'Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, family or corporation - only through some general category'; and he quotes for comparison the modern French Africanist Professor Roger Bastide: 'It is clear that the African defines himself by his position .... When one asks him what he is, he places himself in a lineage, he traces his place in a genealogical tree.' Lévy-Bruhl, whose 'primitiveness' subsumes all mentality except that of his most rationalist readers, earlier made a generalization which, with more or less qualification, has underlain many interpretations of African thought:

If primitive mentality pictures the individual as such, it does so in a way that is wholly relative. The individual is apprehended only by virtue of his being an element of the group of which he is a part, which alone is the true unit.

This collectivist philosophy, so to call it, appeared as characteristically 'African' very recently in a pamphlet put out to explain African values in the Rhodesian-Zimbabwe elections. It is summed up at a religious level of interpretation (to which in a somewhat different way I shall later return) in Fr. Placide Tempel's almost mystical recreation of a traditional African metaphysic:

For the Bantu, man never appears in fact as an isolated individual, as an independent entity. Every man, every individual, forms a link in a chain of vital forces, a living link, active and passive, joined from above to the ascending line of his ancestry and sustaining below the line of his descendants.

So, it might be said, at a more mundane level, do all who take the idea of incorporation seriously - members of royal houses, for example, or ancient Colleges. 'Bantu philosophy' here corresponds to that of the Bourbons, the Hapsburgs, the Tudors, and innumerable families established as the 'so-and-so's' of their local communities, whose secure conviction of their hereditary status, far from inhibiting individuality, has sometimes led them to indulge and exploit it.

Much humour and drama in African (as in other) oral literature and history, derive from a keen perception of individual eccentricities, the deliberate or accidental flouting of convention, slips of the tongue which reveal private reservations, clever calculations of personal advantage, and selfish obsessions (often represented in Africa as gluttonous greed), all of which defy or subvert accepted standards of judgment and behaviour. Many African songs are also, contrary to what was once supposed about their anonymous, communal, 'folk' origins, usually assigned to their individual composers, who hold the copyright, as it were, and they contain images and allusions which are incomprehensible (though they may be exciting in the context of performance) without a knowledge of intimate local and personal experience of the composer himself. In this

respect, like much of the best poetry, they make the private self public, while retaining a sense of privileged admittance to its privacy.

Dr. Francis Deng, himself a Dinka, writing of the Dinka of the Sudan, describes how songs voice experiences, attitudes and emotions which people keep to themselves in the course of daily conversation. His account of the relationship between private self-esteem and public esteem (and it is clear to anyone who has taken part in a dance that up to a point the dancers are dancing for themselves) recalls the Yoruba dance of the tortoise:

The power of group song lies largely in the chorus, even though the role of the individual solo is a pivotal one, showing that the significance of the individual is not overshadowed by this group demonstration. The fact that there are points in dancing when every individual chants his own *mioc* [individual praises, or 'he does his thing'] shows the significance of songs and dances to the ego of each person. Even the group reference to "I" [when the choral singers refer to themselves together as 'I' and not as 'we'] indicates that group solidarity is fundamentally a construction of individual egos.

Evans-Pritchard pointed out in 1928, *contra* Radcliffe-Brown's doctrinally sociologizing interpretation of dancing as an expression of, and training in, social harmony and conformity, that Zande dances were often turbulent affairs, involving '... slanderous songs, sexual indiscretions, competition (for self-display is essentially aggressive when thwarted)', and referred to the airing of private grievances at large public gatherings, with several hundreds of dancers.

I have said perhaps more than enough to suggest that one can lay too much one-sided stress on the collectivist orientation of African ideas of the person. Obviously, the less differentiated a people are by occupation, interests, ideals, and origins (and the readers of Mauss and Lévy-Bruhl were by comparison with most Africans of the time very differentiated indeed), the more of their private, as well as public, values and resemblances they may be expected to share; but the recognition of the importance of an inner, mysterious *individual* activity, comparable to what is meant by speaking in English of 'what goes on inside' a person is attested by many proverbs.

The 'what goes on inside' a person may not be fully grasped by that person himself, as is recognized in a Fipa (Tanzanian) proverb: 'What is in the heart, the heart alone knows', glossed by Dr. Roy Willis as '... we don't know everything about ourselves through our intellect', which accords both with psychoanalysis and with some African notions of witchcraft, for a witch may not always be thought conscious of being so. Fr. Tempels, with all his mystique of the collective, quotes a Congolese proverb, 'None may put his arm into his neighbour's inside', meaning 'The neighbour's conscience remains inviolable even for his closest friend'. The most quoted of all Zande proverbs according to Evans-Pritchard is

'can one look into a person as one looks into an open-wove basket?', the open weaving being contrasted with close weaving, which conceals what is inside - as when a Zande also said that 'Our bodies are like a man who builds a hut to reside in. Our real person is the strength (or breath) which is in our bodies and is the soul (*mbisimo*).' Such statements, and many more - the Fante proverb 'one never knows what is in another person's heart', the Dinka proverb 'what is inside a person is like what is in the forest or the river' (i.e. hidden, often dangerous, and unpredictable) - all allude to the importance, no matter how much store may be set by social role and status, of individual, private, intellectual and emotional activities: the private self. The real difficulties of translation arise when we ask (and we may ask mistakenly, for the question presupposes particular kinds of answer) for a description of the private self that acts and is acted upon, and where that action is located.

There is now for Africa (as there was not in Mauss's time) an extensive literature on the vocabularies used by African peoples to describe the emotional and intellectual attributes of human beings, attributes often represented in that literature as separate 'components' of the total person or personality. It appears from much of that literature that some African peoples (and naturally some of the most articulate in this respect come from Francophone Africa with its inheritance of French education) formulate their indigenous metaphysical systems more clearly than others; have reflected more than others on the nature of the self, for example; and have their own men of learning to enter into debate about it. Also, whether in the nature of the information or in its interpretation, there are, in any language, difficulties in deciding whether some expressions are to be taken more literally or more metaphorically, since in all societies some people are bound to be more literal-minded than others. The close Fanti friend of mine who gave me the proverb 'One never knows what is in another person's heart' added (for even their friends never know what anthropologists may make of their information) that 'of course this doesn't refer to the physical heart'.

I now return particularly to the Dinka of the Southern Sudan, for among them I had that experience of daily conversation which enables one to discriminate, as we take for granted in the language into which we were born, between what people mean and what they say. Then one learns also what kinds of questions, formulated in an alien mode of thought, might receive answers - but answers which, though grammatically, syntactically and even semantically plausible, do not represent, and may positively misrepresent, indigenous and spontaneous interests and ideas.

The Dinka were indifferent to many of the metaphysical speculations and distinctions which comparative studies in Africa and elsewhere might lead one to seek among them. The commonest answer to a foreigner's questions of a speculative kind is 'I don't know'. In the first, and even now outstandingly competent, grammar and vocabulary of the Dinka language, published almost exactly a hundred years ago, the great missionary-traveller Fr. Giovanni Beltrame gave samples of dialogue in the 1870s

between the missionary and the Dinka. Despite imposing upon the Dinka some conspicuously Christian eschatological doctrines about heaven and hell which were clearly being fed back to him, the missionary truthfully represents in the dialogue the frequency of the answer 'We don't know'. But it is an assertion of agnosticism in the strict sense, a doubt about the questions, not a confession of ignorance. It does not mean 'but we should like to learn' but rather 'The answer means nothing to us'.

According to the literature again, some African peoples have ideas of a soul-body dichotomy analogous to that which is generally assumed in Christian Europe, but differing from it, importantly, in allowing for the presence of several distinct 'souls' in each person. It might be possible to make some sort of translation of the belief into Dinka, but it would make no traditional sense; for the word by which 'soul' would have to be translated is the word for breath and breathing, and for the presence of life which breathing signifies. To suggest therefore that a person might have several 'breaths' with different attributes, would be as odd to the Dinka as would be the notion of a plurality of different souls in one of their number to the other fellows of All Souls College, Oxford. Missionaries, using *weei*, breath and life, as the best approximation to translate 'soul', have presumably successfully reshaped the Dinka word for their converts - reshaped it into a unitary term for a moralised and spiritualised self-consciousness of each separate individual in relation to a personalized God.

I hope that further research especially among converts will tell us something about how this translation of conscience intimately takes place. In Dinka traditional thought, the breath/life comes from and in some way returns to God, but otherwise little resembles the 'soul', understood as a ghostly counterpart of the living person, the 'ghost in the machine' as Ryle called it, which atheists as well as theists could imagine to be morally good or bad, and doctrinally consigned to heaven or hell. There is a Dinka word, *atyep*, which might adequately translate 'ghost', but not 'soul' for it means primarily a shadow, image or reflection, and may properly be regarded as the image of the dead as reflected in the memories and experiences of the living. The *atyep* is not 'something inside' a living person.

I shall now imagine (and with some misgivings, for the experience upon which I base it are some 30 years behind me) that a Dinka without recourse to the vocabulary of European philosophy or theology were to contribute to this discussion in traditional Dinka idiom; and I shall try to represent what might be said by using the nearest literal equivalents in English to Dinka expressions, leaving the Dinka words for footnotes in a later publication. The Dinka word for 'person' has strong masculine overtones, but in some contexts may mean 'mankind' as when we use the capital 'm' for 'Man'. A living person has a body which is animated by breath/life, but body and breath are not in apposition as 'body and soul' are in English. Dinka would not normally say what would be translated word for word as 'a dead body'. For 'corpse' they might perhaps say 'the body of a person who has died', but

the natural expression would be simply 'a person who has died'. What is then left is not strictly the 'body', which also means 'self' as we shall see, but flesh and bones and the rest. The breath/ life is stronger in the more vigorous, whether people or animals; is weaker in the old, in children and in the sick; and departs when a person dies. In prayer and sacrifice God is asked to give and support the breath/life of people and cattle, but this breath can scarcely be regarded as a 'component' of human personality, since it differentiates humans only according to their degree of vitality, has no moral qualities, and merges the human self-image with what is in the nature of all sentient beings, perhaps especially cattle. Further, breath is obviously both inside and outside our bodies, whereas the qualities of personality are spoken of as in the body. The 'what is inside' a person is in general spoken of as 'in the belly', though the reference may specify that particular part of the body more or less according to context. (The 'what is inside', it is interesting to note, seems to be cognate with the Dinka word for 'truth').

It is through metaphors based primarily upon the head and the heart (and more from the heart than from the head) that most moral, affective and intellectual states are expressed. Like many other peoples, the Dinka tend to relate thinking to the head (though not to the brain, and cleverness is shown in the eye) and feelings to the heart. But many mental activities much more complex than sensations and affections are referred to the heart - doubt and suspicion, for example. There are numerous expressions using the words for 'heart' and 'head', with adjectival qualifications. Here are a few examples taken from the entries under *pwou*, 'heart', in Father Nebel's little Dinka dictionary. I give my literal translations of the Dinka entries. Fr. Nebel translates the word *pwou* generally as 'heart, chest, mind, intention', and then includes: 'my heart is there' (or 'in it') for 'I agree, I like'; 'my heart is not there' (or 'in it') for 'unwillingly'; 'heart lost' for 'to forget, to lose control of oneself' (though for 'to forget', 'my head has lost' would be more usual); 'to forbid the heart to someone' as 'to be heartless to' (perhaps 'to harden one's heart' would be as close in the English idiom); 'to have the heart darken' as 'to be startled, frightened or sorry'; a phrase which may mean 'not to have enough heart' or 'heart not to suffice' as 'to be suspicious'; 'to have a small heart' as 'to be discreet, humble'; 'to have a big heart' as 'to be proud' - for '*magnanimous*' I think one would have to begin by saying simply 'good-hearted', and add words for generosity, nobility, forgivingness and so on. The most commonly-used expressions are 'sweet (or tasty) heart' for 'happy' or probably more accurately 'contented', and 'bad heart' for 'aggrieved'.

Even from this short list it will be seen that the metaphorical associations of the Dinka word *pwou*, heart, for defining human characteristics, thoughts and feelings, often does not coincide with the English idiom, and in another context it might be interesting to consider the implications of such cultural and linguistic differences. ('Lionheart', for example, could literally in Dinka suggest a were-lion who changed form in order to



devour people.) But here my interest is of another kind. Although, like ourselves sometimes, the Dinka often put the hand to the heart, or the head, when speaking of conditions associated with those parts of the body, the linguistic usages are consciously metaphorical. To take and use the physical heart of a victim in order to possess oneself of its qualities (as is sometimes reported to happen in ritual murders in other parts of Africa and elsewhere) would appear as evilly superstitious and wicked to the average Dinka as to the average European, though that is not to say that there are no superstitious and wicked people either in Dinka land or in Europe. Those whom Europeans call 'psychopaths' are those whom the Dinka call by words translated as 'witch' or 'sorcerer'. But for most Dinka, the distinction between the metaphorical and the literal resembles that of an ethnically-related people, the Southern Luo of Kenya, for whom the indigenous distinction between the physical and the moral content of metaphors is quite explicitly and deliberately emphasized by a Luo author, A.B.C. Ochalla-Ayayo:

The heart, *Chuny* according to the Luo, is the site of the intellect and ethical emotions and wisdom of a person. They consider emotions of attitudes, evil thoughts, pure feeling, wisdom, hospitality and generosity as invoked from the heart, *Chuny*. The Luo make a distinction between physical heart, which they call *Adundo*, and the spiritual heart, *Chuny*. It does not appear that *Chuny* which also means liver is [in that meaning] referred to in this context, since the positions they point at when asked for physical *Chuny* [in the sense of liver] and spiritual *Chuny* of a human being do not correspond. The spiritual heart is situated somewhere beneath the end of the central cartilage, a spot believed to be occupied by the physical heart. Yet they do not call it *Adundo* when ethical emotions are implied, but *Chuny*, spiritual heart.

The Dinka do not have two words for heart, but otherwise this distinction - and also connection - is implicit in their usage.

Such are some of the ways in which Dinka speak about themselves and others, and these forms of self-expression clearly represent that 'sense' of the simultaneously mental and physical which it was not part of Mauss's intention to dwell upon, but without considering which we should have little to say about their ideas of human personality. It seems to me that the Dinka language, unlike modern, educated, and for the most part metropolitan English, compels its speakers to integrate the moral and physical attributes of persons together within the physical matrix of the human body. In modern English, moral and mental conditions are spoken of in more or less abstract terms (anger, suspicion, forgetfulness and so on), cut off, for most, from their etymological roots. We say 'I trust him', for example, and could ask in a Platonic way 'What is trust?'. In Dinka, one would have to say 'I know his heart', and should the question then arise of what it means to know someone's heart, it would be necessary to return to what is meant by 'heart' in other contexts. It may

be that the disjunction, for most modern English speakers, between abstract terms and concrete imagery has something to do with the complex foreign origins of the English language. Non-literate Africans can explain the etymology of words as non-literary English-speakers cannot, but that is beyond my province. The difference is however consistent with the absence, among (in this case) the Dinka, of the mind-body dichotomy which many writers of this century have wished to resolve. D.H. Lawrence is perhaps the most fervid of many who attacked what Eliot called the 'dissociation of sensibility', the separation of thinking from feeling, in modern civilisation, and (like Mauss) attributed some ideal undivided self to American Indians (he read a good deal of anthropology), peasants, workers and others whose lives and language had not been corrupted by bookish education - among people who, like Matthew Arnold's Scholar Gypsy, had escaped:

... this strange disease of modern life,  
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,  
Its heads o'er tax'd, its palsied hearts.

And still an integration of thought and feeling in metaphor and imagery is what we seek to have recreated for us in the best literature. We go to the theatre to hear Cordelia say:

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave  
My heart into my mouth ....

not 'Even on this distressing occasion I cannot bring myself to display my emotions'.

The importance of the bodily matrix in Dinka notions of self is shown finally in the very word most often used where we should use 'self', for that indeed is the word *gwop*, 'body'. 'I myself' is literally 'I body', 'yourself' is 'you body'. Body here is obviously not like 'self', a pronoun, but a noun intensive of the personal pronoun. Body, *gwop*, is incorporated in many metaphors, for example 'light body' for 'healthy', 'sweet body' for 'lucky', 'body afraid' for 'shy, embarrassed or timid', 'body heavy' for 'sick'. There is also a real reflexive pronoun for 'self', quite different from the word for body, and which signifies also 'apart from others' or 'separated from others'. Thus 'look after yourself' ('take care') uses the reflexive pronoun *rot* as does 'to kill oneself', and 'to love oneself' - that is to be a selfish, self-interested and self-indulgent person. If one were to translate Shakespeare's line 'Sin of self-love possesseth all my soul' into Dinka, it would have to be something like 'I have been very wrong (mistaken, missed the mark, as in aiming) because I have loved myself very much' using the reflexive pronoun *rot* again. But that is enough of a discussion which does no justice to the poetry of the Dinka language, by reducing it to something that sounds like a dull form of pidgin; I introduced it to give an impression of the way in which at almost every point the Dinka language allows for a wide range of intellectual and moral discriminations without leading into a seemingly autonomous world of abstractions. Words, as it were, must return to base.

And here I return to Professor Ryle, for the Dinka mode of thought and expression has correspondences in the work of a distinguished English academic. Consider Professor Ryle's account of his elusive concept of 'I':

Like the shadow of one's own head, it will not wait to be jumped on. And yet it is never very far ahead, indeed sometimes seems not to be ahead of the pursuer at all. It evades capture by lodging itself inside the very muscles of the pursuer. It is too near even to be within arm's reach.

Thus in the use of bodily imagery, the Dinka (and probably other African peoples), and one of the most reformist of modern British philosophers, come together - the Dinka never having been entangled in the 'entities and quiddities' of European metaphysics, the Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy in Oxford having determined to get rid of them, as did Samuel Butler in satirizing his omniscient philosopher more than 300 years ago:

Beside he was a shrewd philosopher  
And had read every Text and gloss over

....

He could reduce all things to Acts,  
And knew their Natures by Abstracts,  
Where Entity and Quiddity,  
The Ghosts of defunct Bodies, flie;  
Where Truth in Person does appear,  
Like words congealed in Northern Air.

If our imaginary Dinka mentioned earlier were to be given a course in Descartes, he might well conclude, like another of Descartes's critics, A.J. Krailsheimer:

The *Cogito* is achieved at the price not only of severing all the traditional bonds by which man has been joined to other men and the world around them, but also of splitting in two the personal union of mind and body and expelling the instincts of the latter.

Mauss seems to have sensed (to use that word) this strain placed upon European intellectuals of his time; but one fact seems strange to me. Mauss was in very close collaboration with Henri Hubert, especially in writing of religion; and it is reported that on one occasion, when that doyen of Catholic studies of comparative religion in the Vatican, Pater Schmidt, referred somewhat slightly to Hubert and Mauss as 'two Jewish authors', Mauss replied: 'I accept for myself, but not for Hubert, who is descended from Pascal.' With his awareness of, perhaps even pride in, an indirect connection with Pascal, it does seem odd that one of the three most famous statements in French about 'le moi' (the others being 'L'Etat c'est moi' and 'Après moi le déluge') is not seriously considered, as far as my reading has gone, by Mauss: that is Pascal's aphorism 'Le moi est haïssable'.

For what follows from that aphorism in the *Pensées* would certainly be taken for granted by those whom Mauss contrasted with enlightened philosophical (or philosophized) man:

In short, the self (*moi*) has two qualities: it is unjust in itself, in that it makes itself the centre of all; it is offensive to others, in that it wishes to enslave them; for each self (*moi*) is the enemy, and would wish to be the tyrant, of all others.

Mauss may too easily and optimistically have described that Pascalian self as an aberration from the idealised self of his essay, directed by only the most altruistic and rational categorical imperatives:

... I shall show you how recent is the philosophical term "self", how recent is the "category of the self", the "cult of self" (its aberration) and how recent is respect for the self - and in particular for that of others (its normality).

He does not really take much account of the part played by religious conviction in moulding ideas of the self, though surely how men see themselves must be influenced by how, or if, they see the gods. Dr Deng represents for the Dinka what could be found in one form or another in, I should think, all African ethnography. Referring to the Dinka myth of creation, to which I shall shortly turn, he writes that it

... addresses itself to the question "Where is God?" which the Dinka sometimes wonder about, and not to the question "Does God exist?". Among the Dinka the latter is never posed. Should it be posed, as it is now with the introduction of inquisitive Western culture, the immediate answer would be "Who created you?".

And if egotism and egoism were condemned among the Dinka, as they certainly traditionally were, it is not because of some democratic and secular ideal of the quality and brotherhood of man (though equality and brotherhood were probably actually achieved among them more than among many who politically profess them), but because of the profoundly religious orientation of their thought, their respect for the gods.

God and Man begin to be mutually defined in a myth recounting that in the beginning, God created a man and a woman, whom he kept close to him. He forbade them to pound more than one grain of millet a day which sufficed, but because they were 'greedy', the woman pounded more, and in doing so raised up her long pounding pestle (as women do now when pounding). The pestle struck God, who then withdrew into the above, and must now be brought near to help human beings by prayer and sacrifice. So human beings, quite usually referred to as 'the ants of God', are as tiny and helpless in relation to God as ants are to men. God's transcendence ultimately reduces all merely human persons to the same level, and since in Dinka thought God and gods are quite different in kind from Man (scarcely any less anthropomorphic or more

abstract representations of divinity could be found in Africa), the virtual deification of human beings and human qualities is quite alien to Dinka thought. There are no man-made representations of the divine.

But this distant God (like Professor Ryle's elusive 'I') though out of reach can be *interfused* (I may say this is not sociopsychological jargon, but comes from Wordsworth), with the human person and the human body. In states of possession, which any Dinka may experience and all must certainly have seen in others, divinities 'seize' or 'capture' the human person, body and all. The self is then temporarily replaced by a god, both subjectively and objectively, for it appears that the person possessed has no subjective experience of possession. He (or she, for it often happens to women) is replaced by a spiritual being, a being of another order. People appear temporarily to lose 'self-control'.

It will have been apparent from what I have said earlier that the Dinka are a very rational, even in some ways rationalist, people, especially when confronted with the non-rational constructs of foreigners. It is not difficult for the most part to share, or at least give a notional assent, to their way of talking about themselves. But here, in the acceptance of the interpenetration from time to time of the human and the divine (and of the divine as defined, of course, by their tradition), there appears an experience into which foreigners cannot really enter, for while still living in the same political and social world, they do not belong to it by descent, and descent itself has a profoundly religious value.

This is brought out clearly in the relationship between the members of Dinka clans and what I have elsewhere called the 'divinities' of those clans, for which the commoner anthropological term is 'totem'. The Dinka comprise a large number of such clans, of which the members are all the generations of the descendants of an ancestor in the male line. Each clan has its divinity or divinities, inherited through all the fathers. The divinities are figured as plants, animals, natural forms, etc., which clan members take care not to injure; but for the Dinka, they are not themselves these material emblems, but spiritual beings. The clans are religious corporations, and the Dinka themselves speak of clansmen as being related to, and through, their divinities, and of being 'joined' or 'united' in those divinities. From the Dinka point of view, though all clansmen are equivalent in certain situations - in blood feud, for example - this clanship does not diminish the individuality of its members by making them mere units or cells of the larger organization, as some of what I earlier quoted about the predominance of the collectivity in African thought might suggest. Rather it adds something to each individual, as (on a rather shaky analogy) a strong sense of belonging to an Oxford college does not diminish the individuality of its members.

The archetypical clan-divinity, that of the most respected clans of priests, is Flesh itself, represented by the flesh of sacrificed oxen, held to be intermittently immanent in the bodies of its clansfolk, but also, like other divinities, transcendent.

It is both within those who inherit it, and outside and above them; the most spiritual aspect of the self is embedded in flesh and blood. The clan-divinities are most commonly called upon in invocations and prayers as 'that [quality, possession, very nature] of the father', and brings to mind, figured in the divinity, the life they have inherited, embody, and pass on - some vital power which indeed is part of each clansman, but does not come from him or her alone, and which informs each successive generation. When, at sacrifices, the divinity Flesh 'awakens' (in the Dinka term) in the flesh of some of those who venerate it, they become possessed. Sometimes they produce a kind of glossolalia. Occasionally they may break into short staggering runs. For the most part they appear withdrawn into themselves, their eyes unfocussed and unseeing, their muscles twitching and quivering. According to the Dinka, when thus possessed they are literally 'not themselves'.

On such occasions, there appears a dimension of the Dinka self into which an outsider cannot really enter, excluded as he is from the intensely-felt relationship of clanship which in part, at least, possession by the divinity seems to represent. The individual 'I', both public and private, is temporarily submitted to and replaced by the clan 'we', and perhaps only Dinka can tell us further what this entails.

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