

## THE CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION IN LÉVY-BRUHL'S 'PRIMITIVE MENTALITY'

S. A. MOUSALIMAS

THIS paper is intended to explain the concept of participation in the theory of 'primitive mentality' of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939), who produced seven books on the topic (including *Les Carnets*, published posthumously). Participation was the essential phenomenon in his theory, and he was the first and is perhaps still the only person to have treated in depth the concept of participation in other cultures. His initial book on the topic has recently been reprinted in its official translation by Princeton University Press (1985).

This essay casts light on Lévy-Bruhl as the philosopher he was, rather than as the anthropologist he is often interpreted as being. It provides a fresh perspective by demonstrating that he based his theory on a priori philosophical categories which he maintained from beginning to end and that he imposed these categories on ethnography. Lévy-Bruhl was a philosopher involved in the epistemology of metaphysics.

### *Lévy-Bruhl, Philosopher*

Having obtained his first degree in philosophy in 1879 and completed his doctoral thesis in the same field in 1884, Lévy-Bruhl received an appointment at the Sorbonne, where by 1904 he became the Titular Professor of Modern Philosophy

All references are to Lévy-Bruhl unless indicated otherwise.

and Director of Studies in Philosophy. It was in this capacity that he produced his books on 'primitive mentality'.

His initial book on the topic, *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (1910; translation reprinted 1985) was prompted by at least three intellectual pursuits. The first two are well known: a study of universal human morality, from which Lévy-Bruhl had derived *La Morale et la science des moeurs* (1903), and a general study of Chinese philosophy. The former convinced him that human morality and human nature were relative: they varied according to societies. The latter (the study of Chinese philosophy) took him a step further, convincing him that the very modes of human thought varied essentially.

Essential variation: this conviction set Lévy-Bruhl apart from the British anthropologists of the time, and in his own introduction to his first book (1985: 16-32) he contrasted his view to that of the 'English school', particularly to the theories of E. B. Tylor, James Frazer and Andrew Lang. These theorists assumed that 'primitives', also known as 'savages', exercised rudimentary logic just as they used rudimentary tools: their minds were undeveloped types of 'our civilized' minds. In contrast Lévy-Bruhl (1985: 76) exclaimed: 'let us abandon the attempt to refer their mental activity to an inferior variety of our own'. However, his hypothesis was not an advance: it was a lateral move on the same horizontal plane, for 'their mental activity' remained 'primitive', *inférieure*, but in a novel way.

The third interest which prompted his first book was psychology, and especially psychopathology. He had taken some clinical courses in this field while studying for his first degree in philosophy (Cazeneuve 1972: ix), and he maintained an interest in it. It sparked ideas about mental functions in 'primitive' societies (1985: 14), and while formulating his theory he received 'practical help from the fairly large number of psychologists' who followed the now obscure Theodule-Armand Ribot (1839-1916). Ribot and his successors studied the importance of affectivity and motor movements in mental life. Ribot himself had concentrated, according to Lévy-Bruhl (1985: 14), on the 'emotional, passionate, and even pathological standpoint of our social aggregates'. While Ribot had studied 'our aggregates', Lévy-Bruhl intended to study other people.<sup>1</sup>

Psychology and philosophy were more or less interrelated, more so during psychology's formative years, just as the social sciences and philosophy were interrelated. A generation before Ribot, the importance of affectivity in human awareness had been stressed in philosophy by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819), on whom Lévy-Bruhl had published a work in 1894. So Lévy-Bruhl had also received insight into affectivity from his own field of philosophy. More importantly, he received it within a dichotomy which dominated epistemology, for Jacobi had developed his theory as an antithesis to the rationalism of Hume and Spinoza. This dichotomy is the key to the fundamental structure of Lévy-Bruhl's

1. It may be interesting to note that Lévy-Bruhl's theory on 'primitive mentality' in turn stimulated some aspects of Jean Piaget's theory on child psychology. Piaget's theory has been reassessed very recently by Petrovich (1988).

theory, a key that can be easily grasped when the philosophical themes which occupied him are uncovered.

Immediately prior to his initial work on 'primitive mentality', his major publications were *La Philosophie de Jacobi* (1894) and *Lettres inédites de John Stuart Mill à Auguste Comte* (1899), and very soon afterwards *La Philosophie d'Auguste Comte* (1913) was published. His major lectures at the Sorbonne were on Hume, Descartes and Schopenhauer (Cazeneuve 1972: x). These themes represented a dialectic in contemporary philosophy: on the one hand were the empirical rationalism and logical positivism of Descartes, Comte, Mill and Hume, and on the other the irrationalist antitheses of Jacobi and Schopenhauer.<sup>2</sup>

The dichotomy was, of course, well established in epistemology. A generation before Lévy-Bruhl, the irrationalist antitheses had already contributed to socio-economic and psychological theories such as those of Vilfredo Pareto and Sigmund Freud, and to Ribot's theory of affectivity in group psychology. This dichotomy in epistemology is the key to the structure of Lévy-Bruhl's theory, for the philosopher translated the dichotomy into 'scientific mentality' on the one hand and 'primitive mentality' on the other.

### *The Theory*

'Scientific mentality' adhered to the rules of logical discourse and of empirical investigation as established in rhetoric and in contemporary science. According to these rules, categories were mutually exclusive, so that nothing could be two things at once; nor could they be in two places at once.<sup>3</sup>

By definition, this mentality excluded the theologies of consubstantiality, consubstantiation, and omnipresence. Lévy-Bruhl, however, was not forthcoming about this exclusion. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, who recognized this, attempted to account for the author's obscurity:

For him, Christianity and Judaism were also superstitions, indicative of pre-logical and mystical mentality ['primitive mentality'], and on his definitions necessarily so. But, I think in order not to cause offence, he made no allusion to them. (Evans-Pritchard 1965: 90; 1981: 130)

2. The term 'irrationalist' is not meant here to equate philosophies as different as Jacobi's and Schopenhauer's. It is meant instead to indicate the reaction against, and the rejection of, empirical rationalism and logical positivism. The reaction was not single but manifold. Rejection occurred to various degrees and with differing intensities.

3. Modern science is somewhat less absolute because of the discoveries in physics where, for example, matter is sometimes indistinguishable from energy, and particles from waves.

However, it is likely that the one who wished not to cause offence was Evans-Pritchard, who therefore refrained from expressing a more obvious reason. Had Lévy-Bruhl been direct, he would have found himself in an awkward position, calling theology 'primitive mentality'.

Philosophical metaphysics would also be excluded from 'scientific mentality' by definition, because they involved concepts of the presence, or the participation, of transcendent phenomena in mundane phenomena, and vice versa. Lévy-Bruhl avoided this arena too, although his purpose, as he articulated it (e.g., 1975: 99, 362; 1985: 384, 386), was to explain the functioning of 'participation' in metaphysical thought. But he did not tackle metaphysical philosophy in any of his rather obsessive seven books on the subject. Avoiding philosophy, he skirted round the type of challenge that Evans-Pritchard, ever perceptive and always polite, posed rhetorically (1965: 88; 1981: 128): 'one might further inquire into which class Plato falls, or the symbolic thought of Philo and Plotinus'. For instance, Plotinus's *Enneads*, Aristotle's *Protreptikon*, as well as many of Plato's Socratic dialogues would be excluded from 'scientific mentality' by Lévy-Bruhl's definition. Avoiding philosophy and theology, he drew his examples from the open field of anthropology, from the customs and sentiments of non-Western 'primitives'. While as we shall see, a number of anthropologists vigorously rejected his categorization as inappropriate, just as classical philosophers or theologians would have done had he applied his categorization directly to those fields, how many of the anthropologists were schooled in philosophy, or in theology, to a degree sufficient to perceive the underlying issue? Lévy-Bruhl drew his examples from anthropology, or more precisely from ethnography, but he was in fact engaged in a philosophical debate regarding the epistemology of metaphysics in Europe.

His alternative phrase for what he termed 'scientific mentality' must therefore be taken with care. He called it 'our mentality'. Who, though, were 'we'? Evans-Pritchard perceptively observed that 'he does not distinguish between the different sorts of us' (Evans-Pritchard 1965: 87; 1981: 127). The phrase would apply only to circles who shared Lévy-Bruhl's mind and presuppositions.

It is therefore erroneous to replace his phrase 'our mentality' with the phrase 'Western mentality' (which he did not use), because their 'mentality' could not contain whole areas of Western metaphysical and theological thought or of Western society. The replacement has occurred in the new introduction to the recent reprint of his first book on the subject (Littleton 1985). Rather than between Western and non-Western mentalities, Lévy-Bruhl's contrast was between 'scientific mentality', as it occurred within some circles in his time, and 'primitive mentality', as he described it.

He described 'primitive mentality' primarily by two aspects which he identified in this first book (1910) and maintained with slight revision to his last notebooks (1949). It was 'mystical' and 'prelogical'. These aspects need to be explained here in detail. To begin with, they were not 'two distinct characteristics' but instead 'two aspects of the same fundamental quality' (Lévy-Bruhl 1985: 78).

'Mystical' signified the content of thought, 'prelogical' indicated the connections between thoughts. Lévy-Bruhl (*ibid.*) expressed this as follows:

These are two aspects of the same fundamental quality, rather than two distinct characteristics. If we take the content of the representations more particularly into account [in other words, the content of perception and thought], we shall call it mystic - and, if the connections are the chief consideration, we pronounce it prelogical.

'Mystical' signified the content of the collective representations in 'primitive mentality', representation was a concept in sociology and psychology. In the former case it had been developed especially by Emile Durkheim and his circle in Paris through their journal *Année Sociologique*. Lévy-Bruhl opened *Les Fonctions mentales* by providing their definition of the term and giving them credit for it (1985: 13). Accordingly, representations were a social reality: they were 'common to the members of a given social group', had existence beyond the individual members, and were 'transmitted from one generation to another'. We may add that the transmission occurred through customs, through myths, and supremely through group rituals. Also (and most importantly for Lévy-Bruhl), representations awakened 'sentiments of respect, fear, adoration, and so on' in group members. Later (*ibid.*: 35-6), referring to the concept of representations in psychology, he strongly stressed that in 'primitive representations', affectivity was the definitive element.

The contents of 'primitive collective representations' were thus essentially affective in nature. Thus 'mystical' had a double meaning. First, it meant that the forces being represented were imperceptible, hence mystical, while none the less considered real by the group (*ibid.*: 38). Secondly, it implied that these forces were unclear, because while arising from collective affective experiences, they were represented as if they had another existence of their own: the representation was different from the underlying reality. Furthermore, these forces (the contents of the collective representations) were not subject to cognitive thought processes. Indeed, 'primitive collective representations' were defined consistently by Lévy-Bruhl as non-cognitive and non-conceptual, beginning with the very first pages of his initial work on the subject (*ibid.*: 35-7).

The next aspect of 'primitive mentality' focused on the 'connections' within the collective representations. This aspect was 'prelogic', a term which Lévy-Bruhl coined. He later abandoned the term because it had attracted intense criticism, but he never abandoned the concept: the essence continued to exist without the form, as he explained in his last notebooks (1975: 99).

The prefix had two meanings. The first was obvious: the mentality was antecedent to logic. Lévy-Bruhl seemed to nullify this meaning, because as soon as he introduced the term he briefly stated: 'by prelogical we do not mean to assert that such a mentality constitutes a kind of antecedent stage, in point in time, to the birth of logical thought' (1985: 78). The explanation was delayed for 300 pages, when in the last chapter, entitled 'The Transition to the Higher Mental Types', he

described at length the process by which prelogic evolved through antecedent stages into logical thought (ibid.: 361-86). When earlier he had briefly stated that prelogic did not constitute 'a kind of antecedent stage in point in time', he meant only that it was not necessarily antecedent.

Growth could be stunted. Prelogic could become institutionalized and ossified - he used the term 'crystallized' (ibid.: 380) - so that it kept being repeated and was never superseded. Lévy-Bruhl's prime example was none other than Chinese philosophy which, he said, afforded 'a striking example of this arrested development': the Chinese prelogical 'habit of thought' had become 'rigid', so that it kept 'revolving around its own axis' (ibid.).

But this delayed explanation was not the only cause of difficulty about the meaning of 'prelogic', for he posed the following rhetorical question as soon as he introduced the term, again without immediate explanation (ibid.: 78): 'Have there ever existed groups of human or pre-human beings whose collective representations have not yet been subject to the laws of logic? We do not know, and in any case, it seems to be very improbable.'

The question was vague and its answer indefinite, but its content was actually quite simple: collective representations might always have been subject to the laws of logic, just as physical phenomena were subject to (for instance) the law of gravity. Logic might have operated on the collective representations, as a natural law operated on a physical object, but (in any case) logic was not exercised as the governing principle within them, just as a natural law was not exercised by the physical object on which it operated.

This brings us to the second meaning of the prefix in 'prelogical'. It indicated the exercise of a principle that was different from logical principles and utterly indifferent to them. We may grasp this meaning by contrasting 'prelogical' with 'alogical' (*alogique*) and 'antilogical' (*antilogique*), as Lévy-Bruhl himself did (1985: 78). 'Alogical' signified that logical rules had been suspended, 'antilogical' that they had been opposed. But 'prelogical' meant they were no way involved, not even to be suspended or to be opposed. Another principle, wholly different from logical principles, accounted for the connections in 'primitive collective representations'.

This principle was 'participation'. Indifferent to the rule of non-contradiction, participation allowed multinumeration, consubstantiality and multilocation. In other words, it allowed something to be both singular and plural, both itself and something else, both here and elsewhere at the same time. Lévy-Bruhl explained this as follows (1985: 76-7):

In the collective representations of primitive mentality, objects, beings, phenomena can be, though in a way incomprehensible to us, both themselves and something other than themselves. In a fashion no less incomprehensible, they give forth and they receive mystic powers, virtues, qualities, influences, which make themselves felt outside, without ceasing to remain where they are.

In other words, the opposition between the one and the many, the same and another, and so forth, does not impose upon this mentality the necessity of affirming one of the terms if the other be denied, or vice versa.

Thus participation was utterly other than logic, and it was the pre-eminent factor in 'primitive mentality'; in other words it was on the irrational (affective, non-cognitive) side of the dichotomy. Developing this theory through examples extracted from ethnographies, Lévy-Bruhl followed his initial book on the subject (1910; translation 1926, reprinted 1985) with a series of subsequent books (1922, 1927, 1931; translated 1923, 1928, 1935b respectively) in which he attempted to demonstrate how participation operated in primitive representations worldwide. He also travelled internationally, lecturing on his theory: in 1931 he presented a summary of his views in the Herbert Spencer Lecture at Oxford.

#### *Critics and a Recent Advocate*

As his theory became known, the dichotomy attracted intense criticism, especially from anthropologists who had lived with so-called 'primitive' people. Critics included Bronislaw Malinowski in a lecture in 1925 (published 1948: 25-6), Robert Lowie (1937: 216-21), and Paul Radin (1927). These have been cited in the new introduction to the recent reprint of Lévy-Bruhl's *How Natives Think* (Littleton 1985). They recognized Lévy-Bruhl's fundamental dichotomy and rightly rejected it.

Malinowski's and Lowie's criticisms, however, might be too easily dismissed for the following reasons. First, they did not clearly differentiate Lévy-Bruhl's field of speculation (namely collective representations) from other fields, such as material culture and social structure. Secondly, and more importantly, they did not differentiate his use of 'logical' as a technical term signifying formal logic from its more general use signifying coherence. By underscoring instances where Lévy-Bruhl had recognized coherence (connections or order) in representations as well as other instances where he had recognized logical principles, or logical inferences, occurring in material culture, someone attempting to defend him might assert that these critics had misread him. The author of the new introduction to *How Natives Think* has in fact done this (Littleton 1985: xvi, xvii). But it seems to me improbable that men as literate as Malinowski and Radin would both have misread the same text. It seems more likely that while recognizing the fundamental dichotomy and rejecting it outright, they either overlooked the subtle distinctions or cast them aside as superfluous. After all, Lévy-Bruhl had blurred the distinctions himself.

Radin's criticism has similarly been dismissed too easily by the same recent advocate. The criticism may seem inaccurate, if quoted out of context, as for example when Radin (1927: 230) states that Lévy-Bruhl's 'primitive man'

remained dominated by prelogical participation and never reached the logical stage. Littleton's recent defence might then seem plausible: 'Lévy-Bruhl does *not* contend that *all* primitive thought is predicated on the law of participation' (1985: xvii, original emphasis). Radin, however, was not referring to all primitive thought, but specifically to collective representations. He expressed his criticism in a lengthy discussion, in fact an entire book, devoted specifically to customs, symbols, myths and beliefs. Making a distinction between 'thinkers' and 'men of action' (1927: 229-30), Radin demonstrated that collective representations were subject to cognition (reflective thought, interpretation and systematization) by 'thinkers' in 'primitive' societies, while 'men of action' inherited the representations and accepted them without thought. Lévy-Bruhl had considered only the latter, the 'men of action', Radin explained. Lévy-Bruhl had ignored the 'thinkers'.<sup>4</sup>

Another important critic was the budding anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1934; reprinted in *JASO* 1970), who presented a careful summary of Lévy-Bruhl's terms and theory. The tone was polite and understated, which seems to have led Littleton to assume that Evans-Pritchard's work was 'a lengthy defence' and that he was 'an early admirer' of Lévy-Bruhl (1985: xxii). But Evans-Pritchard described himself as a critic (e.g., 1952; 1965: 81). His now classic work on the Azande (1937), published soon after his article on Lévy-Bruhl (1934), was meant largely as a refutation of Lévy-Bruhl's theory. As he himself explained (1965: 81), he had summarized the theory not because he agreed with Lévy-Bruhl but because he wished the man to be judged for what he had actually written. In this sense he may have been defending Lévy-Bruhl up to a point, and I suspect in deliberate contrast to his own teacher Malinowski whose criticism was hyperbolic. But Evans-Pritchard criticized Lévy-Bruhl for the same reason Malinowski, Lowie and Radin had: he made 'civilized thought far more rational' than it was and 'savage thought far more mystical', so that his 'primitive mentality' was 'a caricature' (Evans-Pritchard 1934: 7, 9). Evans-Pritchard, like these other critics, recognized and rejected this fundamental dichotomy. The only major difference between him and the others was that he pointed out some of the theory's subtle distinctions (and he was polite).

While Malinowski and others might have exaggerated the dichotomy, Middleton has diminished it by turning the theory's double negatives into an affirmative. The double negatives were 'not antilogical' and 'not alogical'. They have been interpreted as an affirmative indicating an alternative logic which constitutes a foreign but rational mentality. This conclusion is reminiscent of some schools of cultural relativism, but did it belong to Lévy-Bruhl's theory? Does it follow from his formulations?

4. It is noteworthy that Radin (1927: 387) saw Lévy-Bruhl's theory as a regression, an 'older contention unfortunately revived ...that the mentality of primitive man differs intrinsically from our own'. Radin's teacher Franz Boas had done much to correct the 'older contention' in the U.S.A.



If 'antilogical' and 'alogical' were the sole causes of irrationality, then the double negatives could be rendered as the affirmative: as the causes did not exist, neither would the effect, and 'primitive mentality' would therefore not be irrational. But irrationality can have other causes. It can be caused by the utter absence of logic, and by the operation of a principle wholly different from logic. Lévy-Bruhl's double negatives were meant to underscore this absence and to signify the operation of a principle that had no relationship to logical principles. The resulting mentality would not be illogical, because it had no reference whatsoever to logic, not even negative reference. Neither would it be rational. This was Lévy-Bruhl's theory. He was not positing another dimension of rationality but of irrationality. Indeed, he himself described 'primitive mentality' as irrational, affective, non-conceptual and non-cognitive, from his initial book on the subject consistently to his last notebooks. The critics grasped this fact.

### *The Revision*

In the face of international criticism of the dichotomy, Lévy-Bruhl withdrew. As he candidly admitted, he 'took refuge in withdrawal' (1975: 100). Rather than advance his theory in his next two books (1935a, 1938), he described more 'mental habits' and 'customs', and did so without employing the controversial term 'prelogical'. Then, finally, after nearly two decades of intense criticism, he revised his theory in his last notebooks (published posthumously 1949; translated by Peter Rivière as Lévy-Bruhl 1975). The revision, however, was slight. Lévy-Bruhl merely shifted the source of the dichotomy, while retaining the dichotomy itself: the fundamental structure of his theory remained intact. As criticism had forced him to account for the co-existence of rational and irrational elements in human mentality world-wide, he shifted from two mentalities to a single universal mentality, but within this universal he continued to identify two modes of thought, and they corresponded to his original two mentalities.

Of the two, one mode was brought forth by cultural factors, so that it predominated over the other in a particular society. The cultural factors were either the formal rules of logic on the one hand, or mystical collective representations on the other. Initially, the cultural factors had imposed a mentality on to human minds. Now they brought forth a mode from within the mind. Initially, culture had been the source of the dichotomy. Now, the human mind contained the source: the mind was 'the mainspring of the rational and the irrational' (1975: 99). The source of the dichotomy thus shifted while the dichotomy itself remained. Lévy-Bruhl continued allocating the same attributes within the dichotomy. The logical remained 'rational', 'cognitive', 'conceptual', and 'ours'. The mystical remained its antithesis: 'irrational', 'affective', 'non-conceptual', 'primitive'. He even continued to refer to the two mentalities, 'our mentality' and

'primitive mentality', because the mystical mode predominated among 'primitives' and the logical mode among 'us' to such an extent that they constituted distinct mentalities. Whenever necessary, he now simply qualified 'primitive mentality' with the parenthetical phrase 'of the human mind' (e.g., 1975: 101).

There was an exception: the term 'prelogical' was dropped. The reason was simple. The term had become 'difficult to maintain' (1975: 104). It had also become redundant (1975: 99-105): 'primitive mentality' no longer needed a principle other than logic to account for its internal connections (its inner coherence), because the 'primitive' was no longer posited as separate from the logical. It was distinct but not separate. Logic was more or less exercised in the human mind universally. Also, 'primitive mystical' could no longer be defined as antecedent to 'our logical' mentality, because now the two modes coexisted to varying degrees in humanity in general.

Much has been made of this single exception as if by dropping the term 'prelogical' Lévy-Bruhl had given up most of the initial characteristics of 'primitive mentality'. His recent advocate has made an assertion of this sort (Littleton 1985: xxi), probably following Needham, on whom he has greatly relied (*ibid.*: xliv), although Needham's statements were perhaps somewhat less absolute (1972: 164, 167). In any case, Littleton has quoted a solitary exclamation by Lévy-Bruhl himself, who at one point in his last notebooks (1985: 100-1) wrote: 'let us expressly rectify what I believed correct in 1910'. But while the exclamation has been quoted (Littleton 1985: xxi), Lévy-Bruhl's own qualification of this bit of hyperbole has not been. The author identified those elements from 1910 that he had now rectified: he had now recognized 'mystical mentality' as 'present in every human mind' and he had dropped the term 'prelogical'. That was all.

The rectification was merely an adjustment which left the dichotomy, his central concept, unchanged. We may grasp this fact by recalling the initial definition of 'prelogical'. Had it been defined as a distinct characteristic, dropping it would be like dropping a pillar from a foundation: the result would necessitate a new construct. But instead of a distinct characteristic, 'prelogical' had been defined as an 'aspect' (1985: 78, quoted above). In other words, it was a perspective or an appearance. A perspective can change without affecting the construct, an appearance can change without affecting the foundation. Dropping the term 'prelogical' did not affect fundamentals.

Lévy-Bruhl stated this himself. 'Prelogical' 'did not disappear entirely' (1975: 104). Its 'very essence' continued to exist 'without the form' (*ibid.*: 99). The essence was participation.

*Affect of the Revision on Participation*

As prelogic faded, the other aspect, that is the 'mystical', became more pronounced and subsumed the essence, 'participation' (1985: 104-5). From a principle other than logic, participation became 'something felt' (1975: 105).

Now affective, participation could be more easily explained both in its derivation and in its persistence. It derived from the mystical experience. The mystical was affective: the experience was 'the feeling...of the presence, and often of the action of an invisible power' (ibid.: 102). This experience involved two perceptions simultaneously: the sensory perception of physical things and the affective perception of the invisible power. The two perceptions 'interwined and interlaced'. They intermixed continuously, and this intermixing was the experience of participation. It felt the mystical (the affections) to be in the physical world. It also felt single things to be multiple and in many places at once.

Participation persisted because it derived from the affective mode in the human mind, which now existed universally. So participation surfaced even among the civilized. But it remained 'fundamental to the activity of the primitive mentality' (ibid.: 105), in which the mystical affective mode predominated.

Participation remained essential: there was 'barely a mystical experience' in which it was not involved (1985: 102). And it remained an essential element on the irrational side of the dichotomy, and Lévy-Bruhl continued describing it as such. Just a few examples of his descriptions follow. They are from his last notebooks after the revision: 'The affective category of the supernatural is participation' (1975: 106); 'participation [is] felt not thought' (ibid.: 157); 'in order to explain participation, it is necessary to take great care to stay on the affective level and not to fall into the temptation of letting oneself slide into the cognitive level in order to render it intelligible' (ibid.: 106); 'there is neither law nor principle of participation' (ibid.: 104); 'Participation is not a logical function' (ibid.); and 'participation involves something deeply rebellious to intelligibility' (ibid.: 99).

And so, from beginning to end, the philosopher placed participation strictly on the irrational side, in a dichotomy which he maintained without change. And he consistently defined participation as affective, non-logical, non-conceptual, or non-cognitive, and primitive.

He was quite right in identifying participation as an essential element in religious mentality (which he called 'primitive mentality'). But is participation entirely affective? Is it necessarily non-logical and unintelligible?

### Epilogue

Lévy-Bruhl insisted that participation was irrational without dealing with concepts of participation from philosophy or theology. He made only a very few, brief references to Platonic philosophy in particular, and a few, indefinite references to theology in general (e.g., 1975: 99, 151; 1985: 370, 385).

In his defence, it might be argued that he intended to grasp participation as it functioned not among philosophers and theologians but among 'primitive' people. But his 'primitives' included the Chinese and the Hindu, and he used Greek philosophic terms in his analysis (e.g., *mimesis* and *methexis* (1975: 112-13)). Furthermore, he articulated another, overriding aim: to explain the occurrence of participation in metaphysics. This was a constant aim which he identified in his first book and last notebooks (e.g., 1975: 99, 362; 1985: 384, 386).

But he never tackled a philosophical or theological concept head-on. Instead, he hacked at their roots (but with an axe as flimsy as the assumption that mystical experiences lacked content beyond affectivity). Avoiding philosophy and theology, he concentrated on ethnography. Here the problem compounds and tumbles into the laps of anthropologists, for Lévy-Bruhl used ethnographies uncritically and abused them, stretching and moulding the data to fit his scheme.

Errors of this sort have been well documented for the comparative method in general during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As for Lévy-Bruhl's errors in particular, they were pointed out by Evans-Pritchard (1934) and have been shown more recently with greater detail in a carefully documented, well-written article (Smith 1972).<sup>5</sup>

Smith's article is meant to extricate the South American Bororo from Lévy-Bruhl's caricature of them, by which they have become known in the literature. Lévy-Bruhl used them for his first fully-developed example of participation. Because they had red 'parrots' as a kind of totem, he depicted them as people who actually thought of themselves as human beings and 'birds of scarlet plumage *at the same time*' (1985: 77, original emphasis). He maintained the description to his last notebooks, referring to the 'Bororo-parrot' (1975: 192). Thus, shaped to fit Lévy-Bruhl's own definition of participation, these people became manifestly irrational. In fact, a person is quite insane who thinks he is a man and a bird with red feathers. And so we might remember the anthropological critics' single voice of complaint against Lévy-Bruhl's 'primitive mentality', despite his subtleties.

These problems in anthropological method are well established. There is no need to develop the argument any further, except by reference to thorough work like Smith's, for the purpose of this argument has not been to flog a dead horse, but to shed new light on a ghost, and to help him back into the grave.

5. Evidently this article was overlooked by Littlejohn, who does not cite it. It has been included in a select bibliography for Lévy-Bruhl in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Rivière 1987).

REFERENCES

- CAZENEUVE, Jean 1972. *Lucien Lévy-Bruhl* (transl. Peter Rivière), Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- EVANS-PRITCHARD, E. E. 1934. 'Lévy-Bruhl's Theory of Primitive Mentality', *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts* [Egyptian University, Cairo], Vol. II; reprinted as Evans-Pritchard 1970.
- ... 1937. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- ... 1952. 'Introduction' to Lévy-Bruhl 1952.
- ... 1956. *Nuer Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ... 1965. *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- ... 1970. 'Lévy-Bruhl's Theory of Primitive Mentality', *JASO*, Vol. I, no. 2, pp. 9-60.
- ... 1981. *A History of Anthropological Thought* (ed. André Singer), London: Faber and Faber.
- LÉVY-BRUHL, Lucien 1894. *La Philosophie de Jacobi*, Paris: Alcan.
- ... 1899. *Lettres inédites de John Stuart Mill à Auguste Comte* (edited with an introduction by Lévy-Bruhl), Paris: Alcan.
- ... 1910. *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, Paris: Alcan.
- ... 1913. *La Philosophie d'Auguste Comte* (3rd edn., revd.), Paris: Alcan.
- ... 1922. *La Mentalité primitive*, Paris: Alcan.
- ... 1923. *Primitive Mentality*, London: Allen & Unwin.
- ... 1927. *L'Ame primitive*, Paris: Alcan.
- ... 1928. *The 'Soul' of the Primitive*, London: Allen & Unwin.
- ... 1931. *Le Surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalité primitive*, Paris: Alcan.
- ... 1935a. *La Mythologie primitive*, Paris: Alcan.
- ... 1935b. *Primitives and the Supernatural*, London: Allen & Unwin.
- ... 1938. *L'Expérience mystique et les symboles chez les primitifs*, Paris: Alcan.
- ... 1949. *Les Carnets de Lévy-Bruhl*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- ... 1952. 'A Letter to E. E. Evans-Pritchard', *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. III, no. 2, pp. 117-23.
- ... 1975. *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality* (transl. Peter Rivière), Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- ... 1985. *How Natives Think* (transl. Lilian A. Clare, 3rd edn.), Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- LITTLETON, C. Scott 1985. 'Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and the Concept of Cognitive Relativity', in (an introduction to) Lévy-Bruhl 1985.
- LOWIE, Robert H. 1937. *The History of Ethnological Thought*, New York: Rinehart and Co.
- MALINOWSKI, Bronislaw 1948. *Magic, Science and Religion, and Other Essays*, New York: Free Press.
- NEEDHAM, Rodney 1972. *Belief, Language and Experience*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

PETROVICH, Olivera 1988. 'An Examination of Piaget's Theory of Childhood Artificialism', Oxford University: D.Phil. thesis.

RADIN, Paul 1927. *Primitive Man as Philosopher*, New York: D. Appleton.

RIVIERE, Claude 1987. 'Lucien Lévy-Bruhl', in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion Volume 8*, New York: MacMillan.

SMITH, Jonathan Z. 1972. 'I Am a Parrot (Red)', *History of Religion*, Vol. XI, no. 4, pp. 391-413.