

The Meaning of Culture

Martin B. Bonar

In Japan 'culture' is a word we often come across. Politicians use it when they wish to appeal to our patriotism. Journalists use it when they wish to sound intellectual. Social critics who appear on low budget television programmes butter their biscuit-dry commentaries with it and so-called non-fiction journalists write so-called non-fiction books about its multiple variations. Psychologists explain away the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune in terms of the 'shock' you get from it. Teachers are always talking about the necessity of its acquisition and otherwise sane people are prepared to go to 'culture centres' and pay to be imbued with it. It is a very popular word. We hear it so often in fact that we very seldom pause to consider what it might really mean. Does it mean different things to different people? And do different people's uses of the word have anything in common? Or is it in fact just a pretty balloon, an inflated shape holding nothing but hot air, a meaningless flounce of fashion?

If we look for help in our English-Japanese dictionary we find under the heading 'culture' first of all the expression 'kyouyou' (教養). This can be taken to refer to learning about 'the arts', about poetry, and classical music, ballet and beautiful painting. It also includes the concept of being soft and nice, sensitive and delicate. A 'cultured' person is thought to be superior to the ordinary man in the street. His hands are clean. He has money, but he does not work. He watches Channel 12 on a television set kept in a closet next to the futon and does not let his children watch TV at all. He writes haiku in the evenings and never plays pachinko. He hates American football and ice hockey. In Japan he, usually he, is a 'sensei'. He embodies the soul of the nation.

Satire aside, this is the central aspect of the meaning of culture as it is generally understood. Its importance can clearly be seen when we begin to look at problems of international communication. One can always manage, given a little time, to consume and even relish a slice of raw squid, but Japanese calligraphy, for example, is something that ninety nine percent of Europeans cannot even begin to understand. This, however, is not, the sense of 'culture' on which I wish to focus in this essay.

Nor do I wish either to talk about culture in its 'shiiku' (飼育) meaning or its 'baiyou'(培養) meaning. I am not here concerned with agriculture or biology. It is worth mentioning, however, that these two expressions are far from irrelevant to helping us toward an understanding of what 'culture' truly means. Both 'shiiku' and 'baiyou' are connected to the idea of culture by their word origins. The word 'culture' is derived from a Latin verb 'colo' (principle parts 'colo, colere. colui, cultum'), which, among other things, means 'to till the soil'. This is a clear signpost toward seeing culture as a concept that is connected with the idea of growing and developing.

A further meaning of 'colo' is 'to inhabit', 'to live in a place'. When man became an agriculturalist, a cultivator, he was naturally forced to spend at least one season in one location, he was obliged to establish some kind of settlement. He was also obliged to borrow the labour of other people, while, most likely, lending his own. The settlement became a community, one where mutual help and cooperation was desirable. To promote such mutual aid some kind of organisation was needed. Some kind of rules, nowadays called laws and customs, were needed. In other words, cultivation instigated the need to develop a social fabric, a society. And it also led to the need for us to become good, that is to say useful and cooperative members of that society. This called 'civilisation' and is commonly contrasted with barbarism in the extreme example of which the members of a group prefer to consume each other rather than wheat or beans. In English 'civilisation' is a word which is often used in combination with or as a substitute for 'culture'. The words 'bunmei' and 'bunka' are often similarly interchanged in Japanese — although we may feel that there is some difference between them. Incidentally, it is interesting to notice that if we try the dictionary approach to the word 'culture' and look a little closely at the two Japanese words 'bunka' (文化) and '(文明)' we come up with a quite different answer as to its meaning. Both of these words contain the character 文 which stands for 'writing'. Clearly, according to the Japanese idea, the difference between a society without culture and civilisation and a society which has culture and civilisation lies in the development of letters, in other words in the ability to read and write.

That again, however, is not the meaning of culture that I want to discuss. I want instead to define 'culture' as the customs, civilization, and achievements of a time and a people.

Anthropology, of course, is the technical name for the scientific study of human culture. Anthropology used to be thought of as the study of so-called primitive peoples, for the example the people of the South Pacific islands or of Papua New Guinea. It

consisted in the Darwinianly inspired observation of dark-skinned people by light-skinned ones, the underlying assumption being that dark-skinned people were at an earlier stage of evolution than light-skinned ones, and were therefore also closer to the apes. This could be demonstrated by the fact the subjects of study wore few if any clothes. An influence at once Rousseauite and also Christian could also be detected. Polynesians were reckoned to live some sort of pre-Adamite existence and consequently to have no sense of sin — sin referring, of course to the sexual variety of offending God. In its early days there was a distinct popular impression that anthropology was the study of the naked and the free. Anthropologists, for their part, maintained that they had chosen those particular peoples because they thought that the way of life of such so-called undeveloped peoples would be easy to analyse and would help us to understand modern man. In the first part of this expectation, at least, they found that they were wrong. Life on Samoa was not life in paradise. The economics of life on Samoa were perhaps fairly simple, but as it turned out social relationships and family relationships were exceedingly complex. Relationships to the world of nature were complicated also. It turned out that a heavenly existence was as bound about by rules and regulations as that of any Western wage slave's. Everything in Samoan life, it was discovered, was governed by magic and taboo.

For a while anthropologists focused on these exciting topics. Writing about magic and, from the European point of view, strange clothes and customs, was good for selling books and later for selling television programmes. Little by little, however, serious scholars began to take a more liberal view of so-called primitive societies. Anthropologists too are influenced by the political opinions of their period. They began to say that there was no such thing as a 'primitive' culture. They began to say that all cultures, all civilisations even, are different but equal in value. Linguistics, during its Bloomfieldian field studies period, came to share this view. Language scholars began to say that there was no such thing as a primitive language, grounding their assertion on the argument that in every language people were able to say what they needed to say and what was primitive about that? Language scholars, particularly those in the field of American Indian Languages, were able to contribute to the anti 'primitive' argument by pointing to the complexity of the grammars they were recording. The eventual outcome of all this was that anthropologists no longer focussed on such groups as the aborigines of the Australian outback but began to widen the area of their studies to include for example the people of Asakusa in Tokyo and the middleclass people in the wealthy suburbs of London.

It was out of this wider way of thinking, this wider discipline that a new definition of culture began to appear. According to this definition, the culture that each of us has or adheres to becomes an awareness of the existence of a web of 'rules' which tell us how we are and how we are not allowed to behave. Culture becomes the indispensable moulder of our sense of identity. It tells us who we are and where we are in the universe. It gives us a feeling of group security. This definition maintains that when we lose our culture we are in grave danger of losing ourselves. One might almost compare this gift of culture with the receipt of a national passport. Only the most cynical would deny the feeling of security that the possession of a passport brings — whence the tendency of new travellers to compare passport photos, their real aim being to prove their membership of the group — and the anxiety that loss or potential loss of the document provokes.

One effect of this theory is to bring us to a greater awareness of the reasons for racist attitudes and intrasocial frictions. We can also see that cultural behaviour is not something you can readily change as you would a type of costume. The Saville Row shirt covers many a heart that owes no allegiance to Mayfair. New generations can adopt a new way of behaviour if it is relatively superficial, a matter of fashion even, but if the difference between the old culture and the new one is very great even a hundred years or more may not be enough to allow a psychologically comfortable change to take place. It is not a coincidence that even today many American Indians become alcoholics, or that the suicide rate among young people in Samoa is very high. Nor is it so strange that under the stress of culture shock and fear of a strange environment a young Japanese man living in Paris should go mad and stock the flesh of Dutch ladies in his refrigerator.

It is not my present purpose, however, to talk about the differences between the customs, the behaviour and the perceptions of space and time which different groups of people possess both within their own societies and in comparison with the societies of others. I wish rather to concentrate on the points which human beings hold in common, the ones which tend to be forgotten because they, while constituting the lifeblood of art and literature, are difficult to exploit for the purposes of life's everyday struggle for superiority. At the expense of stating the obvious, allow me to review the most outstanding and undeniable of them: first of all, we are all born of a mother and a father, secondly we all spend a long time as children, particularly in comparison with other animals, we are also intelligent, we live long enough to see many events and have for the most part a sense of the past, we must eat and drink, breathe, and defecate, we

can sometimes control nature and have some ability to predict its behaviour, we can laugh, we have the same fears of death and we must finally die. The equalitarian nature of an assembly of skeletons is a well-worn literary theme.

So much is easy to see. What is not so easily perceived is the degree to which these commonalities have affected the development of tribes and nations all over the world.

Happily there exists a variety of cultural anthropology to which we can turn for help, a variety of cultural anthropology which does not rely for its keys to the past solely on questionable and often questioned research into modern so-called primitive peoples. This kind of cultural anthropology uses instead the records left by the past itself to seek the common threads of human behaviour. It uses folk legends, fairy stories, old travellers' tales, and the myths and poems of ancient literature. It often makes use too of ancient religious literature, which can be seen as having its roots far back in the prehistoric past, in order to build a picture of human development.

This kind of cultural anthropology takes as its themes the worlds of magic and religion and agriculture. It brings to the fore the various meanings of the Latin 'colo', which, as I have pointed out, is the root dictionary form of the word 'culture'. To repeat and to expand, the Latin word 'colo' meant 'to cultivate the fields', with the attendant and wider sense of 'to work'; and also 'to live in a place'; it additionally meant 'to cherish and protect'; it meant too 'to practise skills and hobbies'; and it meant 'to honour and respect others'; finally it could also mean 'to worship the gods'.

If religion and magic play a smaller part in 20th century so-called advanced technological societies than was the case in earlier times, it is because, although even today they often feel helpless and confused in the face of frightening natural phenomena such as typhoons, forest fires, earthquakes and droughts, human beings can find solace in the reassuring explanations of scientists, modern witchdoctors who are often able through their rationalisations to alleviate the main source of the psychological stress caused by natural disasters, its unpredictability. People of ancient times, on the other hand, had no knowledge of the jet stream, of solar radiation, of continental drift, or of gravitational pull. It was natural for them to imagine that the dreadful buffetings they received from the environment were the work of some special kind of malevolent, deranged or just power-hungry individual. Such individuals were thought of as supernatural beings, that is to say, as beings above or outside nature. They were called supermen or gods.

These supermen or gods were not in their initial incarnations thought of as formless spirits since it was literally inconceivable for ancient people not to think of these god-

figures as greatly resembling in their way of life human beings themselves or at least being similar to familiar powerful animals such as bulls and eagles. This is why the gods of ancient Greece, for example, are described as having wives and children, as eating and drinking, as fighting and being jealous and proud and as being very interested in sex. (The Christian religion has continued until recent times — despite or perhaps because of the complexities of Trinitarianism — to see its god in anthropomorphic terms.) This self-created premise of commonality with the gods made it seem ‘logical’ for ancient peoples to conceive of the feasibility of ‘supernatural’ communication — if the gods bore similarities to human beings then their actions could be perhaps be influenced by humans. This influencing, it was thought, could be carried out through the application of the advanced technology of the day — magic. Magic, superstition, and religion are found wherever there are human beings. Together with intelligence, and language, they distinguish the life of man from the life of animals.

But it seems unlikely that early human beings believed in gods from the very beginning. Even the simple idea of a god living in a tree or a volcano is not really a simple idea at all. Just as the idea of almighty gods began with a projection of familiar tribal and family situations onto the world of natural phenomena, it seems likely that religion began with what Frazer¹⁾ of the ‘Golden Bough’ calls ‘private’ magic.

What does private magic mean? It means helping or hurting people around you with the help of special techniques, which Frazer calls sympathetic magic and divides into two varieties, homoeopathic or imitative, and contagious. These techniques are common to areas all over the world and still exist today, even in so-called advanced countries, especially in more isolated areas. I will cite here just a few examples from the thousands that exist. First here are some examples of hurting.

When an Ojibwa²⁾ Indian ‘desires to work evil on anyone, he makes a little wooden image of his enemy and runs a needle into its head or heart, or he shoots an arrow into it’³⁾. In Malaya, the magician took nail cuttings, hair, eyebrows, or spittle from the intended victim, made an image of wax and held it over a fire for seven nights while repeating the magic words: ‘this is the liver, heart and lungs that I scorch . . .’⁴⁾. A more modern if slightly concealed example of the same magic method can be cited from the Japan of the Pacific War. It is said that volunteer women’s association members made Roosevelt and Churchill dolls for the purpose of skewering them with bamboo spears as they practised defence against invasion.

Happily, magicians are not always so malicious or vengeful or patriotic. There are

plenty examples where the aim of the sorcerer is to help. It is said that in India long ago there was a strange method of curing jaundice. The patient was covered in yellow porridge, coloured with turmeric, one of the ingredients of curry sauce, while at the same time three yellow birds were tied with a yellow string to the foot of his bed. By these means it was supposed that the yellow jaundice would be removed⁵⁾. In Borneo the village 'doctor' must lie on the ground and pretend to be dead. He is rolled up in mats like a dead man and lies on the ground for an hour until his fellow doctors release him. He gets up and 'as he recovers, the sick person is supposed to recover too'⁶⁾.

This kind of benevolent magic is often connected with the getting of food or other advantage. It is said that Cambodian fishermen used to take off their clothes and walk into their own nets in order to bring good luck and Frazer, to drive home the universality and contemporary relevance of his remarks records in detail a relatively recent instance of a similar custom in the North of Scotland⁷⁾. In New Guinea the hunter is said to put the bullet of his gun into his mouth before using it, thus symbolising eating the game he hopes to shoot. In Japan, to take again a contemporary example, the third year high school student often goes to a temple, writes the name of the university he aspires to on a piece of paper and ties it to a sacred tree. This establishes a chain of connection between the candidate, his goal, and a source of good fortune.

The New Guinea hunter and the Japanese high school student carry out their actions in the interests of bringing themselves positive success. Much magic, however, involves, avoiding contact with certain things and avoiding certain kinds of behaviour in order to ensure safety or success. This is called taboo. In modern society there are probably many more examples of taboo than there are of positive magic. A glance at the Japanese calendar will quickly show that such ideas are by no means ready to disappear. The '仏滅' and the '大安' reflect the continuing deep influence of the Shinto religion: some days are considered propitious and others are not. In the West, while it contains absolutely no basis either in history or in legend, the superstitious fear of Friday the thirteenth continues to work its spell. It is a day when it is better to stay at home.

The reason why taboos have proved more durable in modern society than the sympathetic efforts of the witchdoctors is, of course, simple. One can normally very easily determine whether or not positive magic has succeeded or failed. The proof is in the pudding. Failure on the part of the gold making alchemist is for him a death sentence. On the other hand, as politicians have been wont to prove, if you neglect or

avoid adopting a course of action, it is very difficult for others to define precisely the area of your responsibility in the case of failure. Remember the old joke about the Londoner who always carries a banana in his hand 'to keep the octopi away.' When his friend remonstrates that there are no octopi on the streets of London, the man has only irrefutably to remark on how effective his method is. Taboos then are still an important part of modern culture and one that is shared by all. The problem is that different societies have with the passage time developed differing taboos and have therefore come to consider different things to be sacred. This is a cause of cultural conflict and misunderstanding.

Public magic is the next step forward from private magic. '...in savage society there is commonly to be found in addition what may be called public magic, that is, sorcery practiced for the benefit of the whole community'⁸⁾. Human history is the history of specialization. A student of physics, biology and chemistry specializes and becomes a doctor; that doctor specialises and becomes a surgeon who becomes an expert in making beautiful noses. Magic was an early example of this trend. The best magician of a tribe became its priest. He and sometimes she, as the tribe got bigger or joined with other tribes, might become king or queen. Such a person was responsible for protecting the tribe from natural disasters. Such a person was also responsible for producing a good harvest each year. In order to do this it was necessary to carry out certain rituals and ceremonies, the most potent of which were carried out secretly, and which doubtless became more and more elaborate in response to occasions of failure.

It is not necessary to look very far in order to find a clear instance of this ancient form of behaviour. As is well known, the Japanese Emperor still carries out ceremonies of this kind in order to guarantee a good rice crop. One might mention in passing that the resistance to eating foreign rice, rice from Thailand, for example, is not unconnected with these ideas. There is an unconscious feeling that to eat foreign rice is to break a taboo, that to eat foreign rice will in some strange way insult the gods of Yamato and cause them to bring earthquakes and bad harvests. This kind of taboo is part of the taboo exercised against strangers and is therefore of particular interest when we are considering matters of international communication. It is a taboo of which there are many examples and which has a long long history. Here is an ancient example given by Frazer: when ambassadors of Justin II, Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, arrived in Turkey some fifteen hundred years ago they were met by magicians who waved incense around them, rang bells, beat tambourines, and went

into convulsions, 'snorting and falling into a state of frenzy'⁹⁾ in order to dispel the dangerous foreign influence. Dislike of Thai rice is not the only modern example of the taboo against strangers - the French government has a law, which is generally considered to be unenforceable, forbidding the use of English words in the media.

Let us return to the Japanese Emperor, since his situation, thanks to its long and continuous history, provides a truly excellent example of how our culture as human beings has developed through the ages. As time went by, our distant ancestors inevitably became more and more aware of the outside world. As memories and the ability to transfer them built up from generation to generation they became more and more aware of their weakness, their powerlessness in fact, in the face of nature. When a human being is forced to deal with a difficult problem the first step is to comprehend its nature and if that is impossible then to reduce it to a form where it lies within the realm of comprehensibility. Thus we may surmise that it was as a first step towards restraining the forces of nature that our forebears began to develop the idea of gods and to attribute to them the power to unleash in moments of displeasure storms at sea or bolts of thunder and lightning. (The still popular Japanese proverb about fathers, fires, lightning, and earthquakes illustrates exactly in what sources such thinking must have had its origin.) These gods, as I mentioned earlier, were at first seen as being not so very different from humans or familiar animals. They were superhuman and not otherworldly. Often, for example, they were imagined as giants. It is not a coincidence that in Greek legend the ancestors of Zeus, Poseidon, and Aphrodite are pictured as an Addams family of not very clever giants, who were called the Titans. In the Greek world actual sexual intercourse between gods and humans was considered possible and led to the existence of demi-gods like Hercules who held a kind of dual nationality.

Once the idea of cantankerous, inconsistent and consequently to an extent malleable gods was formulated the natural next step was to have recourse to public magic. It was thought that if the right specialised techniques were used such superhumans could to some extent be controlled, just as an angry father or tribal leader could be pacified. Human beings' newly acquired confidence in managing the immediate environment, in other words their ability to produce food by farming, led to their becoming more ambitious and confident to the point of hubris. The demand arose for a god-controlling specialist.

In response to this demand the role of the priest/king and his public magic grew enormously in importance. His and occasionally her main function became

communication with the gods. And as that function came to be more and more respected, it became more and more necessary to keep the priest/king pure. It is easy to see how this might happen. Imagine a baseball team that has a four or five year run of championships. Every effort will be made to hang on to the 'formula', sometimes tellingly called the 'magic' formula for success even if it means never washing the team's uniforms, while the coach/manager will be increasingly revered. The year's crop was more important even than a World Series championship so in order to keep the priest/king unpolluted, and therefore able to carry out his job, it became necessary to isolate him from the other members of the tribe. With time the result of this special treatment was that the priest/king became unapproachable, mysterious, untouchable, invisible even, in other words he himself became as a god.

The irony was, and here again Japanese history firmly illustrates the point, that he often became a god without power. He came to be surrounded by endless ceremonies and complex taboos of binary logic which sometimes led to a point where the almighty king could hardly move at all. Frazer cites the wonderful and awful example of The King of the Island of Fernando Poo in Equatorial Guinea.¹⁰⁾ It is said that some hundred and fifty years ago, this person lived in a hut at the bottom of the crater of an extinct volcano. His legs were shackled, he had forty wives, and for clothes he wore only silver coins. He was not allowed to look at the sea, or see a white man's face. As for the Mikado himself, it was said that his feet could not touch the ground; the sun and moon could not shine on his head; his hair, his beard and his nails could not be cut.¹¹⁾ In short the Mikado had become like a god himself.

Numerous other examples, often of African provenance, as befits the supposed cradle of the human race, can be cited to back up this notion of priest/god/king/prisoner. In Lower Guinea the priest king lived alone in a wood. He could not touch a woman; he could not leave his house; he had to sleep sitting in a chair, for if he lay down to sleep, the wind would stop. In Mexico at the time of the Spanish Conquest, the Zapotec priest/king was worshipped like a god; his feet could not touch the ground; the Zapotec people believed they if they saw even his shadow, they would die, so they knelt with their faces to the earth when he passed by. Less dramatically, it was believed in England until a few hundred years ago that a touch of the king's hand could cure certain kinds of disease.

Incidentally, when we look at the Japanese Emperor System from this point of view, it becomes easy to understand why everyday control of government must not be in the hands of the Emperor himself. Everyday business is polluting and can thus be

assumed to weaken the priest/king's ability to control the forces of nature. In this light the development of a substitute ruler or 'Shogun' system can be seen to be perfectly natural. Although to my knowledge no one has ever suggested this one might even hypothesize that the 18th century English 'invention' of the system of ministerial responsibility was not so much a stroke of brilliant compromise that served as the bridge from absolutism to democracy but was simply a rather late application of the Shogun idea. This may account for the worldwide acceptance of an idea that has universal cultural roots. The modern political 'State' has become a kind of abstract emperor, and politicians all over the world have found it possible to justify immoral actions in the name of preserving the purity of that 'State'. It is their claim that they are obliged to sacrifice their own personal honour and integrity, that they have to carry out that which the priest/king may not do himself.

Under this political theory the State can never be wrong. This is something that holds true for the priest/king also, the difference lying of course in the fact that the priest/king is not an abstract idea but a living man, one who is accessible and vulnerable to attack. In consequence to be a priest/king has often been very dangerous. In order to keep the rain falling and the crops growing, there is an absolute necessity for the priest/king to be strong and healthy, as well as pure. Some societies, unlike Japan, have insisted that this be literally true. In Cambodia the King of Fire and Water was beaten to death by his priests when he fell seriously ill. More horrific is case recorded by Frazer of the Matiamvo, who was a great king in the interior of Angola¹²⁾. When it was decided that he had been king long enough, this king was forced to cut off the heads of his mother, sons, wives and daughters. He then sat on his throne while his own arms and legs and finally his head were cut off by a household official. This official, doubtless in the interests of cleanliness and tidiness, was himself decapitated, when he had finished his grisly and blasphemous work.

Sometimes, to maintain their purity, priest/kings were allowed to rule only for a fixed period of time. In parts of Southern India, it is said, the period was twelve years. After that time the king has to kill himself in front of many people, and in front of an idol, in a particularly horrible way. Eight years, in ancient Crete, for example, was also used as a fixed period, while in what is now modern Nigeria kings were ceremonially slaughtered after three years. In Hawaii, a period of one year was set. Finally, it is recorded that in a part of the Congo the king — perhaps one should say a king, as they were so expendable — used to be crowned in the morning and killed the very same night. Needless to say the person who held the real power, the 'Shogun', as it were,

was careful never to become king himself.

As human beings became more sophisticated, however, this brutality came to be mitigated in many instances by a further application of the idea of magic. That application took the form of the idea of substitution. It was realised that direct blood sacrifice, either of the priest/king or of sacrificial victims could be avoided by transferring the act of obeisance and purification to some other object. Religions have often turned at some time or another to the killing of animals in front of an altar as an alternative to slitting the throat of a virgin who might be your neighbour's daughter. Some religions still follow this practice though the sacrifice tends to take the form of a meal centred round the dead animal. Or else it may be money that is sacrificed. Though it may seem far distant from the spilling of human blood the throwing of a few coins into the altar box at the temple of Ebisu is neither more nor less than an example of this kind of substitute sacrifice.

Personal and public magic then, with their concepts of the power of homoeopathic ceremony and preventive taboo, are the common heritage of mankind and can be shown to exist in very stages of development in all corners of the globe. The latest step in that development, namely that from magic to religion came from an increasing awareness of what man could not control.

Crops, it was felt, could be grown more or less successfully, if the crop god was properly respected and if witches were properly persecuted. Rain could be made to fall by performing the appropriate rain dances. (It is important to remember that the various stages of mankind's cultural development contrive to continue to co-exist with each other — though very often not peacefully. It is only three years ago that in England I witnessed a Morris dance, a kind of old folk dance, that was supposed to bring down the rain. And it is not long since the mayor of certain city in Shikoku was not ashamed to take part in a good old-fashioned rainmaking ceremony.) When it came to getting meat, it was felt by common consent that animals could be hunted provided the right sacrifices were made to placate their spirits. In Japan, the Emperor, a shaman among shamans, could, by sitting motionless on his throne for hours and hours, struggle to carry out his sacred duty of controlling earthquakes and typhoons. All these glorious bits of magic could be carried out and their efficacy could be believed in. Even the sun, so it was believed, could be placated and made to relent and come back nearer to Earth if the right rituals were carried out at the Winter Solstice in December. But the stars were different.

Nothing could be done about the movement of the stars. It cannot be proved, but it

must have been the study of the stars that gave human beings the idea of the immovably everlasting. Accordingly the most powerful gods were given the attribute of immortality. When this happened, human culture moved from magic to religion. Prayer and sacrifice increasingly, though never completely, took the place of magic and ritual. Let me say in passing that this is one cause of misunderstanding between East And West. Western Christians, particularly Protestant ones, see Eastern religions as superstitious, that is to say magical, rather than spiritual. Perhaps it would be better to say Far East and West, because in a sense Muslims in this regard have similar feelings to those of Protestant Christians.

To sum up, the culture which now serves to give us our identity in the world, may best be explained as having originated as a powerful defence mechanism, shared by all of humanity and which most likely had its roots in terror of the environment and of the catastrophes that a hostile environment could bring. To support this idea and particularly to support the idea of its universality there is a great deal of corroborative information available in the form of world-wide folk legends, fairy stories, old travellers' tales, ancient literature and ancient religious scripture. Of course, despite the richness of these sources, the evidence remains circumstantial and partially speculative. It is not possible actually to prove that early civilisation was really as I have described it, that it was an agricultural, frightened society that believed at first in magic, and that later created gods in order to give a meaning to its existence. That will not be possible until we have a time machine. It is possible, however, to show that the same patterns of custom and taboo can be found wherever there are human beings, whatever colour or race they may be. Farmers cutting the last stand of corn in ancient Egypt sang a song for the dead corn spirit; the same custom existed in Devonshire in England until recently. At the beginning of the Chinese New Year a ceremony involving an ox takes place; this is supposed to bring a good crop of rice. Similar customs exist in Europe. In parts of Japan the frog is revered as god of the ricefield. These patterns of custom and taboo, along with memories of them, exist for all of us. They are our common points. Not only that, because these customs, these similar cultures, are spread so widely over the globe, among races that could have had no geographical connections over the last twenty thousand years, it seems reasonable to believe that they developed independently as a result of common human problems and experience.

Notes

- 1) Frazer, J. G., *The Golden Bough*, MacMiilan, 1987.
- 2) The rendering 'Ojebway' is used by Frazer. An Algonquian North American Indian tribe.
- 3) *Op.cit.*, p. 13.
- 4) *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 5) *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 6) *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 7) *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 8) *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 9) *Ibid.*, p. 195.
- 10) *Ibid.*, p. 172.
- 11) *Ibid.*, p. 169.
- 12) *Ibid.*, p. 271.

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