

## The Psychological Anthropology of A.M. Hocart

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«When the anthropology of anthropologists comes to be written, future generations will have to explain why the first quarter of the twentieth century was so fascinated by fear, why that emotion was made to account for everything, for weddings, funerals, for religion itself. They will doubtless notice that during the same period there was a great increase in nervous disorders in which fear is the chief element, and they may conclude that there is a link between the two phenomena.»

A.M. Hocart (1934a: 475-476)

### Hocart's Psychology

The influence of early 20th century psychology on Hocart's ethnology was profound. Most telling is that he never lost track of the fact that he was studying people influenced in their individual experiences, consciousness, mind states, and behaviors both by biological and by historical, social, linguistic, and cultural processes (Hocart 1912, 1915). He was similar to Boas (see Stocking 1983: 10) in emphasizing the methodological importance of working in the hosts' language where possible: "Working through interpreters is certainly not ideal, and it is to be hoped that field-workers will in the future undergo a linguistic training and seek to work in the vernacular; but this is not given to all, and it is a great mistake to imagine that because interpretive work is not the best, it therefore is not good" (Hocart 1922c:72). Among other things, this allowed him to test the utility and veracity of Western concepts imposed on local phenomena and categories—and he usually found them wanting. This method allowed him to remain in close touch with how his hosts made sense of things, rather than reifying

English categories on native experiences.

### **Hocart on the Savage vs. Civilized Mind**

Early in his career Hocart rejected the idea that the mind of “savages” (read traditional or tribal peoples) was any different than the minds of peoples of Western “civilizations”: “The mythop?ic man is not yet dead. He is still commonly resuscitated as a mode of explanation. It is necessary therefore to examine his claims to continued recognition. If he has none, the sooner we do away with him the better” (Hocart 1916: 307). Throughout his career Hocart argued against the view that traditional peoples manifest anything like “primitive mentality” (contrasted with “civilized mentality”) in the sense hypothesized by the early evolutionists, and later espoused by Levy-Bruhl (1923; see Hocart 1933:27 on Levy-Bruhl’s ethnocentricity). [1] He showed that the division of psychology into that of “savage” (or “mythop?ic”) quasi-humans (pre-logical, fanciful, child-like) and fully “civilized” humans is both empirically unsupportable and unnecessary to explain ethnographic facts (Hocart 1954: 5). Hocart was particularly addressing the thoroughly ethnocentric, “psychological school” theories of Edward Tylor (1920 [1871]) and James Frazer (1890) who proposed what Hocart (see Stocking 1995: 223) considered to be scientifically untenable explanations for the origins of religion and generalized these explanations to the world.

« The Moderns began by deriving [traditions] from a hypothetical Primitive Mind. If the question was, “Why do men practice magic?” the answer was, and still is, because primitive mind is confused, incapable of apprehending cause and effect. This is the method of the so-called psychological school. ...The Oxford school dispenses with the masses of facts and goes back to the pure speculation of Locke, only it replaces the rationalism of the eighteenth century by the emotionalism typical of the twentieth. » [Hocart 1933: 34]

For Hocart, the minds of all people everywhere operate along the same lines and exhibit the same structural properties.

« It is precisely because savages think in the same manner as we do that they think different things; for the same processes working on different inherited material must lead to different results... The material upon which the savage mind works is inherited tradition and social organization. We imagine, indeed, that we proceed differently, that we white folks each individually derive our knowledge directly from objective reality and that we can see it, each for himself. We conclude that our knowledge is rational, objective, and obvious, and we are at a loss to account how the savage can be blind to facts and truths that are staring us in the face; we have to suppose that the eyes of his soul are closed and that he lives in a world of dreams and vague feelings. Men of all races and all generations are equally convinced that they individually draw their knowledge from reality. A savage will defend his beliefs by an appeal to experience, and his doubts as to the sanity of our own are ill-concealed, though he is too polite to express them. We think that we believe in atoms because they really exist; a Fijian thinks that he believes in ghosts because he has seen them with his own eyes, and after all if he does claim to have seen a ghost what have we to oppose to the testimony of his eyes by

a skepticism which has no reasons but that ghosts do not fit in with European conceptions of the world and are to us an unnecessary hypothesis? » [Hocart 1987:41-42]

People everywhere are born equipped with the same brain (Hocart 1933: Chaps. 2 and 3, *passim*, 1934b: 162), yet confront different worlds with their local contingencies. Each person supports their beliefs, as Hocart says, by recourse to experience. But it is more often the case that we each see the world the way we do because we have been conditioned by tradition to apperceive it so:

« Everyone agrees that savages do not believe in ghosts because they see them, but see them because they believe in them. But it occurs to few [Westerners] to say that we do not believe in our principle of inertia because it is self-evident, but that it is self-evident because we believe in it, or that economic law of supply and demand is to a great extent created by our belief in it, and not our belief created by the law. » [Hocart 1954:42]

Hocart rejected the very common presumption during his day that because savage mentality is qualitatively different than civilized mentality, the languages of savages must therefore be different and more primitive than civilized languages:

« This view may seem quite impregnable to the thinker at home, and, as it once seemed so to me, I cannot blame those whose faith has never been exposed to that powerful dissolvent, experience of savage life. A few linguistic facts picked from various treatises and isolated from their vast context, which is no less than the whole life of the people, are just what tends to breed a false confidence of truth secured once and for all. » [Hocart 1912:267]

Hocart went on to show that working from a language backwards to the nature of the mind that created the language in the first place is empirically impossible. There is no application of the comparative method that can reconstruct the origins of language, but only the historical developments of kindred languages. People speak the language that their elders speak—thus it is a matter of enculturation, not of psychology. The notion that some languages are somehow more advanced than other languages is preposterous, for some languages may make more detailed distinctions in certain domains, and fewer distinctions in other domains of communication than do other languages, but this fact cannot be construed as evidence of superior intellect. It is rather an interesting fact that may lead to insights into the various cultural values of a people. Hocart once again anticipated the debate over whether there exists such a thing as a “primitive” language, an issue that was still being addressed decades later in sociolinguistics (Hymes 1961, Swadesh 2006), and renewed today in arguments about the nature, structure and limitations of the Amazonian Pirahã language of Brazil (see Everett 2005). And in what must be his most famous article, Hocart showed that much of our standard kinship nomenclature is based upon faulty fieldwork and the projection of Western concepts (Hocart 1937). [2] For instance, the presumed “extension” of the term father to other male kinsmen in a lineage is based on the seemingly commonsense, but actually erroneous view that the term translated as “father” means the same thing to a fieldworker’s hosts as it does to the fieldworker. We are assuming the same cognitive process

in cases where a different process is involved.

### Hocart on Psychoanalysis

Hocart was not among those ethnologists who enthusiastically embraced Freudian psychoanalysis in the early 20th century. Indeed, with Malinowski, he was critical of cross-cultural psychological methods generally, and psychoanalytical methods in particular. He was writing before the distinction between “etic” and “emic” methods came into vogue, but he was nonetheless a staunch “emicist” for all that (Headland et al.1990). In a piece criticizing Ernest Jones’ support of Freudian methods for analyzing dreams in non-Western cultures, he notes that:

« ...the method is all wrong, and from a wrong method we can only expect the truth by accident. Yet it is the invariable method of psychologists in historical matters. They do not go first to the historian and ask him exactly what has happened, and then seek to deduce the mental processes from the succession of forms; he evolves an explanation which accords with his psychological theories, then appeals to that explanation as a confirmation of his theories. This method has been applied not only to language but to customs in general. A picture of an Indian myth, for instance, is psycho-analysed as if it had no history behind it; the fact that Greek art, generations of Indian artists, then Mahommedan, then European influence have contributed to shape its artistic conventions is entirely ignored; and then the psychologist is surprised that the historian rejects his work and finally refuses even to read it. » [Hocart 1925:15]

Harsh words indeed, but then the necessity of in-depth, “emically-grounded” ethnography is the *raison d’être* for anthropology as a corrective to the insidious ethnocentrism of Western psychology—the ethnographic project as espoused by Bastian and a principle Hocart lived by. To be fair, it can be argued that Hocart’s understanding of Freud’s theoretical work was spotty and very dated at best. He failed (as do many in ethnology) to realize that Freud was arguing for the same instinctively-driven, self-protecting ego instincts that Rivers had put forward, and that Hocart was proposing. Further, he failed to give credit to Freud for eventually combining sexuality with the self-preservation to form a general *Eros*, or “life instinct,” a concept very similar to Hocart’s own notion, quest for life (e.g., Freud 1925).

As an example, Hocart (1934a, 1936) found it amusing that Sir James Frazer (1934), reflecting the all too common angst of his age, projected Western dread of the dead on traditional peoples the wide world over (hence the epigraph to this essay above). Hocart found this gross generalization untenable when encountering real peoples who manifest a great variety of emotional responses to death and dying. With respect to generalized anxiety among peoples, he argued with characteristic wit that:

« When we get to know [peoples], we find the greatest variety. There are indeed decaying remnants hard pressed by overpowering enemies, by disease, by anxiety for the future, by despair at their own diminishing numbers: they fear much because there is much to fear.

There are others, many others, with the wide open spaces and the future spread before them, free from anxiety, free from nerve-racking bustle and uncontrollable desires, who therefore take both life and death far more fearlessly than we can. Their placidity seems often callous to the over-sensitive European, but the truth is they take things as they come. Their attitude is that of the old men of the Omahas: “No one can escape death and no one should fear death, since it cannot be avoided.” Death is just a break in the routine of life, and death ceremonies tend to be elaborated because men make the best of their holidays. » [Hocart 1934a: 476]

I have myself encountered this kind of projection, both on my own part and on the part of others, at least twice in my own ethnographic research. When doing fieldwork among the So people of northeastern Uganda during a period of extended drought—a period during which food was extremely scarce and children were obviously suffering from malnutrition (Laughlin 1974)—I puzzled over the fact that I encountered few signs of depression. In fact, the only depression I observed was in individuals who were suffering from failed love affairs. Of course, I later understood that there was little depression because, as Hocart notes quite simply, the So “take things as they come”—the So had no false expectations of their environment. The other projection I encountered is the supposed “fear of the dead” on the part of Navajo people among whom I lived off and on during the 1990s. In fact Navajos do not fear the dead or dead bodies, but rather the evil spirit of a person that may hang around the site of their death. Among more traditional Navajos, people will avoid a hut (*hogan*) in which someone has died, for while the good spirit (or “the wind that stands within;” see McNeley 1981) of a person passes immediately back into the Holy Wind from whence it came and hence does not hang around the place of death, the evil spirit (*chindi*) may stick around the place for a long time doing mischief, and if one comes in contact with the spirit they may become sick.

According to Hocart’s reckoning, the Freudian school fares little better than the Oxford school with respect to procrustean method of fitting facts to hypotheses. Both are asking the same kinds of (for Hocart) impossible questions—questions about the ahistorical, psychological origins of traditions and customs—“Freud and his school replace the primitive mind by the Unconscious” (Hocart 1933: 34-35)—which Hocart shows all through his writings to be inappropriate and circular, thus anticipating by decades Carl Hempel’s famous critique of functionalism in 1968.

### **Hocart on Consciousness**

It may be difficult for social scientists today to imagine that in Hocart’s day, science generally, and anthropology in particular, ignored the role of consciousness in evolution, adaptation, and social relations. In a little-known article published in 1934, as well as in the closing pages of *Kings and Councillors* (1970[1936]: 299), Hocart decried this failing in science:

« Consciousness has from ancient times been associated with the soul, that is, some invisible substance conceived as being somehow immanent in the body. For such a soul the scientist has no use, for it helps him no more than phlogiston helped the chemist to understand heat,

or vital fluids helped the biologist to understand life. He therefore ignores the soul, and since he identifies consciousness with the soul that has to go too. Thus it comes that the one solid fact in all nature, the fact that we see, hear, feel, is completely disregarded by natural science.  
» [Hocart 1934b: 160]

Consciousness was conceived by many to be an epiphenomenon, having little or no role in biological adaptation. That was wrong-headed, argued Hocart:

« Intelligence has been defined as the ability of an organism to adjust itself adequately to a new situation. Intelligent action is always set in train by consciousness. Once started it may go on without it [utilizing unconscious processes]. ...Have we in adaptation the true function of consciousness? This presumption is confirmed by the comparison of habit and invention. It is a commonplace of psychology that any new activity is accompanied by a high degree of consciousness; with practice it lapses into the background of consciousness, till at last we cease to be aware of it at all. An actor, when conning [3] his part, must concentrate upon it, which is another way of saying that he must be acutely conscious of every word and its meaning. With each repetition his acting becomes more automatic; it passes out of his consciousness and leaves it vacant for other matters. ...Yet let an unexpected situation arise on the stage, some departure from the routine, and the actor's attention will immediately return, and must return in order that he may adapt himself to the unexpected. ...It may be that every step forward in speech, from the very earliest sound signals to our present language, has been conscious adaptations which *have led to a gradual reorganization of the brain*. [4] Once it was not adapted to the production of sound signals, it is now highly organized to impart delicate shades of meaning. » [Hocart 1934b: 161-162; emphasis added]

Although Hocart decried the methodological errors of the Freudian school, he did not throw out the unconscious “baby” with the Freudian “bath.” After all, he was a protégé of W.H.R. Rivers with whom, as we have seen, he had worked for years. Rivers was one of the most important figures in early 20th century ethnology, neuroscience, and psychology (Slobodin 1997). Rivers was interested both intellectually and clinically in the unconscious—his ideas coming to fruition only after his experiences during the Great War and described in his lectures published in the volume *Instinct and the Unconscious* (Rivers 1920). Rivers was resistant to Freud's single-minded insistence that the “psycho-neuroses” be laid at the door of the sexual instinct and his wartime clinical experiences reinforced that resistance: [5]

« The first result of the dispassionate study of the psycho-neuroses of warfare, in relation to Freud's scheme, was to show that in the vast majority of cases there is no reason to suppose that factors derived from the sexual life played any essential part in causation, but that these disorders became explicable as the result of disturbance of another instinct, one even more fundamental than that of sex—the instinct of self-preservation, especially those forms of it which are adapted to protect the animal from danger. Warfare makes fierce onslaughts on an instinct or group of instincts which is rarely touched by the ordinary life of the member of a modern civilized community. War calls into activity processes and tendencies which in its absence would have lain wholly dormant. » [Rivers 1920: 4-5]

For Rivers, the unconscious is the seat of the instincts: “...the main function of psycho-neurosis is the solution of a conflict between opposed and incompatible principles of mental activity. Instinctive processes and tendencies, and experience associated therewith, pass into the unconscious whenever the incompatibility passes certain limits” (Rivers 1920: 6). Mental faculties range from experiences that are clearly before awareness to experiences that lie at the periphery and are very difficult or nearly impossible to bring into awareness: “In so far as the term *the unconscious* applies to experience, it will be limited to such as is not capable of being brought into the field of consciousness by any of the ordinary processes of memory or association, but can only be recalled under certain special conditions, such as sleep, hypnotism, the method of free association, and certain pathological states” (Rivers 1920: 9). The unconscious, as I mentioned, is the home of the instincts.

« Through the work of modern psychologists, and especially through that of Shand [6] and McDougall [note the influence of McDougall on Rivers—see Charles D. Laughlin, « The Influences Upon Hocart’s Thinking and His Influences on Others » in Bérose, Dossier documentaire A. M. Hocart, « Notes et instruments de recherche »], we have come to see the close relation between affect and instinct. Each of the emotions can be regarded as an affective aspect of an instinctive reaction. Thus, fear is especially connected with the instinctive reaction to danger by flight; anger with the reaction to danger or injury by aggression; love with the parental and sexual instincts, etc., while the primary states of pleasure and pain are the psychological accompaniments of the fundamental reactions of attraction towards the useful and repulsion from the harmful. The primary feelings of pleasure and pain and all emotions, whether simple or complex, can be regarded as aspects of consciousness especially associated with instinct. This close relation between emotion and instinct leads us to a definite theory concerning suppression and the unconscious. It has been found that experience which becomes unconscious through the agency of suppression either belongs definitely to the affective aspect of mind or, when intellectual in character, has been suppressed on account of its association with affective elements. The relation of affect to instinct suggests that *the special function of the unconscious is to act as a storehouse of instinctive reactions and tendencies, together with the experience associated with them, when they are out of harmony with the prevailing constituents of consciousness so that, when present, they produce pain and discomfort.* » [Rivers 1920: 37-38; emphasis mine]

Hocart’s psychological anthropology was heavily informed from Rivers’ instinct/need psychology and Rivers’ views about consciousness and the unconscious. In studying Hocart, I have conclude that his view of the unconscious was so aligned with Rivers that he spent little effort formalizing his own thoughts on the matter in print. Rather, Hocart simply applied Rivers’ account. Put in more modern terms, Hocart believed that the brain relegates repetitious mental operations to lower, unconscious processes, [7] thus freeing-up attention to potentially significant novelty in the environment. Consciousness is integral to rendering such novelty meaningful, and, where necessary, modifying action schema to a new adaptive configuration. Once the new configuration is repeated over and over, it too becomes redundant and hence relegated to unconscious processing (see also Laughlin et al. 1990: 98-99

for a modern view). Hocart considered this role of consciousness crucial to understanding how rituals evolved, and how they are organized, operate, and are modified over time. This role of consciousness is the same for people everywhere, regardless of cultural background. Moreover, the role of ritualization and ceremony is the same across cultures—namely, the pursuit of the good life.

## Ritual and the Quest for Life

Speaking psychologically, and following quite naturally from Rivers' instinct psychology, Hocart held that all humans on the planet have at least one thing in common—the *quest for life*.

« Keeping alive is man's greatest preoccupation, the ultimate spring of all his actions. To keep alive he must have food. But man is not content merely to seize it and devour it. He looks ahead to ensure future supplies. Besides storage he also devised a technique for making food abound, a technique consisting of charms, spells, magic, and so on. » [Hocart 1933: 133]

At some unknown point in the ancient past, our ancestors became sufficiently self-reflexive to not only live and struggle to live, but to conceive of life itself.

« Long ago [man] ceased merely to live and began to think how he lived; he ceased merely to feel life: he conceived it. Out of all the phenomena contributing to life he formed a concept of life, fertility, prosperity, vitality. He realized that there was something which distinguished the animate from the inanimate, and this something he called life. ...How this happened and when, we will not speculate. It is sufficient that all existing races have this concept of life, and that it must therefore be at least as old as their nearest common ancestors, if it is not prehuman. » [Hocart 1970[1936]: 32]

The quest for life among humans is a broader and more culturally nuanced occupation than merely assuring enough food and the procreation of the species—it involves the maintenance of vitality, longevity, equitable resource distribution, alliance among groups, comprehension of death, and so forth. The quest is essentially a social occupation in the sense both of cultural conditioning about just what constitutes the good life, and the collective actions taken to assure the good life. What Hocart

« ...is expressly concerned with is society as a concept, an abstraction from people's observed behavior, and particularly as a conception in the minds of people in quest of life. Men, according to Hocart, sought the good life, and in doing so they effected a purposeful adaptation of their communal life by reproducing in their government the various departments of nature as they conceived them. » [Needham 1970: xlii]

### Myth/Ritual and the Quest for the Good Life

The elements requisite to the good life are spelled out in each people's mythology (Hocart

1922a, 1935). Myth is the body of knowledge upon which important life-giving and life-sustaining action in the world may be grounded. “In other words, the myth is the precedent. It is not a tale told to while away the idle moment, nor is it a deep and purely inquisitive speculation about the phenomena of nature” [Hocart 1952a: 15]. Precedent for what? For ritual; both myth and ritual being requisite to accomplishing the good life by controlling the natural contingencies around us. “The myth is necessary because it gives the ritual its intention” (Hocart 1952a: 16, 1922a). The myth embodies the knowledge presumed in performing the ritual process; the latter often being an intricate interweaving of behaviors and symbols that must be reiterated in precisely the correct way to gain effect. “One or two recitals are not enough; it had to be committed to memory, and its meaning and its reasons had to be expounded in lesson after lesson” (Hocart 1952a: 12).

When Hocart speaks of “ritual,” he is often speaking of an amalgamation of what others distinguish as “magic” and “religion”—an empirically erroneous distinction for Hocart that was as common in his day as it is today (Hocart 1933: 134; see e.g., Moro and Myers 2009). Ritual is a robust complex of mythic stories, rites, procedures and social organization—present in all societies—for assuring the good life. In an intact system, ritual and myth are two aspects of the same psychosocial process: “Thus the myth is part of the ritual, and the ritual part of the myth. The myth describes the ritual, and the ritual enacts the myth” (Hocart 1952a: 22).

« Let us stick to the real myth, the myth which has some relation to the serious business of life. It is a precedent, but it is more than that. Knowledge is essential for the success of the ritual. “He who knows this,” ends our first myth, “conquers all the quarters.” That is the conclusion which winds up myth after myth. The myth itself confers, or helps to confer, the object of men’s desire—life. » [Hocart 1952a: 16]

People everywhere integrate the information provided by myth into their daily lives. Their life is the life that their ancestors lived and taught. People continue to live this life because it is life-affirming—it promises longevity, prosperity, vitality, and contentment. The myths communicate the ceremonies upon which life itself depends. Reflecting upon Australian Aboriginal ritual, Hocart noted:

« These ceremonies take up a great part of [the Aborigine’s] time. We wonder how he can spare so much from the struggle for existence to spend on mere ceremonies, but he does so precisely because existence is so uncertain; the ritual aims at abolishing that uncertainty. There are years when kangaroos, snakes, grubs, yams are scarce, when pools dry up. The ritual is designed to ensure a supply. For every species of food there is a ceremony which causes its increase. That ceremony’s performance by an ancestor is recorded in the myth. » [Hocart 1952a: 22]

The era in which our ancestors merely lived and experienced is long past. Humans not only live, *but they conceive of life and living*, and in thinking about life, they seek to ritually control it.

« Out of all the phenomena contributing to life he formed a concept of life, fertility, prosperity, vitality. He realized that there was something which distinguished the animate from the inanimate, and this something he called life. ...If life comes and goes it must come from somewhere and go somewhere. ...[People] think they know in what objects life resides and into what objects it passes. Man has gone further: he has come to think he can control that coming and going. He has worked out a technique to the end of controlling it. » [Hocart 1970[1936]: 32]

Only more complex societies can afford to detach their myth/ritual complex from the everyday struggle for existence. Although ritual is inevitably accompanied by emotions of one sort or another, it is not emotion that gives rise to and drives ritual—ritual is the result of enacting a people's understanding of and techniques for attaining what they desire (Hocart 1939). When myth does become detached from life, as often happens in societies that have developed a priesthood, the “life-giving” [8] aspect of myth is very likely doomed to the status of quaint antiquity.

« The ritual myth is not the result of perversion by that bugbear of scholars, an all-aspiring priesthood. It flourishes most where there is no professional priesthood, because there it remains in contact with reality. The myth detached from reality can continue to exist only in a society which is itself divorced from reality, one which has such a reserve of wealth that it can afford to maintain an intelligentsia exempt to intellectual play, to poetry, and to romance. ...When a myth has reached that stage it is doomed. Myths, like limbs, atrophy and perish when they no longer work. » [Hocart 1952a: 25]

All peoples have rituals designed to increase a resource. That resource (animal, element, object) is sometimes labeled a “totem” in ethnographic descriptions of tribal people (Hocart 1933: 135). However,

« Most peoples have rites with a wider purpose: they aim at life, that is not only food, but health, and freedom from sickness, accident, and death. Many have ceremonies for the increase of a particular “totem:” the Koryaks for the whale, the Mandans for the buffalo, the Lango for rain, [9] in fact ceremonies for rain and sun are almost universal; but besides that particular object they also include health, prosperity, and even victory in war; besides the specific object there is a general one. Sometimes the specific object drops out. Thus bear ceremonies are held in North America to ensure a supply of bear's flesh; but the Cree have a bear ceremony which has nothing to do with meat, but secures the goodwill of bears, or rather bear-spirits, and their assistance in obtaining long life. This all-round purpose is more obvious in rain-making ceremonies, because rain promotes all manner of food, and so rain is a means to an end, which is plenty. This is even more the case with the sun; for it is often looked upon as the cause of rain. Some peoples have carried this generalization so far that the specific vanishes from the state rites, and life swallows up entirely the narrower aims. » [Hocart 1933: 135-136]

## Ritual and the Evolution of Governance

Hocart's most memorable contribution to psychological, as well as political anthropology was the way he ingeniously tied in the organization of society in the quest for life with the evolution of governance (see especially Hocart 1927, 1950, 1970[1936]). For Hocart, the organization and functions of governance are latent in the social organization of the ritual enterprise—an enterprise that has as its intention the quest for the good life, and that conditions people to apperceive their ritual leaders, their *principals*, as equivalent to the divine. It only requires some social necessity to spark governance into existence from that earlier and very ancient utilitarian organization. [10] Hocart points to the institution of warfare among North American Indian tribes for an example. In these societies, leaders only have the authority of ruler when they are acting as war chiefs. At the cessation of hostilities, the authority enjoyed by the war chief evaporates, and the society returns to its more acephalous peacetime structure. [11]

Hocart expressly alludes to an organic model of governance in suggesting that, just as the functions of coordination are present in animals too primitive to have nervous systems, some human societies are sufficiently simple in organization to be relatively acephalous (my term, not Hocart's). In such societies, social roles are far fewer and less differentiated, and each adult carries out a number of social functions.

« A Fijian is his own farmer, judge, policeman, sailor, statesman, priest, dancer, and singer. An Englishman can be any of these, but not all. ...There is then no government, in our sense of the word, among peoples like the Fijians, because there is no need for any. If, however, we look more closely at such societies we shall discover that nevertheless the machinery of government is there ready to govern, if governing is required. There is, so to speak, a governing body before there is any governing to do. » [Hocart 1970[1936]: 31]

That latent political organization that is already promised in the social organization surrounding ritual is replete with mimetic figures (e.g., the principal) that may be transformed into a king and other officials if and when the need to regulate the affairs of people arises. In other words, ritual organization is preadapted for governance.

### The Divine King

Hocart centers much of his argument on “kingship” because in his opinion the first form of state-level governance was monarchy, and the first form of bureaucratic religion was the divine king—that is, the mimetic apperception of the monarch as a god is a natural extension of the association of the ritual principal of pre-governance times with the ancestor-god (Hocart 1922b, 1927, 1970[1936]), while later forms of governance (e.g., constitutional monarchy, republic, federation, fascism, social democracy) arise in resistance to the excesses of monarchy. Prior to monarchical governance, the organization for ritual, “...exists where there is no government and where none is needed. When however society increases [demographically speaking] so much in complexity that a coordinating agency, a kind of

nervous system, is required, that ritual organization will gradually take over the task” (Hocart 1970[1936]: 35). As with the American Indian war chief, when the king ceases to fulfill his function, the structure of governance may well vanish. Moreover, the first kings very likely did not take the much later form of absolute ruler:

« We have also seen reason to think that the original priest-king was not a person of great majesty; prosaic, at times grotesque, his humdrum function was to ensure a regular supply of food and a satisfactory birthrate by the best means inference could suggest, whether dignified or undignified. He was probably not much more august than the divine kings of the island of Futuna who, notwithstanding that upon them depends the prosperity of the people, are often threatened with deposition if they express opinions distasteful to their unruly subjects; or than the sacred Sau of Rotuma who during his annual reign was distinguished above the people chiefly by sitting on a stool and eating three meals at night as well as by day. » [Hocart 1927:238] [12]

Michael Winkelman (2010: 50-65) has shown that the classic shaman—a socio-religious role that under the right conditions would fit into Hocart’s notion of the principal—is generally found only in small hunting, gathering, and fishing societies in which sociopolitical integration does not extend much beyond the local community. As societies become more complex in their sociopolitical organization, additional “professional,” full-time ritualist roles emerge to take their place among the ranks of the power elite. These Winkelman labels *priests*. While Hocart would agree wholeheartedly with scaling ritual organization to increased levels of sociopolitical integration, he was hesitant about the use of “priest” as a meaningful ethnological concept, principally because it is often fuzzy in application:

« Students of customs both ancient and modern have long been aware that the line which divides a king from a priest is a very faint one and often disappears altogether. They have therefore coined a term priest-king or king-priest to indicate that doubtful personage of whom it is difficult to say whether he is priest or king. He is chiefly to be found in ancient times or in backward communities [see Merrill 2008 for the example of ancient Israel]. Among modern civilized nations the distinction has now become a very clear one. There has therefore been a differentiation of an original genus into two species. » [Hocart 1927: 119]

When the acephalous society changes into a hierarchical form of governance, ritual becomes inevitably focused upon the king:

« The principal of the ritual, if he is a human, [13] is the head of the community. In a small tribe ...we call him the headman; in more advanced or larger communities we call him the king. Sometimes we hesitate between chief and king. Our use of these words is rather arbitrary: we translate the native word one way or the other, according as the state kept by the principal comes near to *our* idea of a king, or falls short of it... » [Hocart 1970[1936]: 86]

All political/spiritual power becomes lodged in a single social role:

« The king is consequently the repository of all power; and when he goes it passes to an

oligarchy. Whether monarchical or republican, the state whose religion is ethical can tolerate no state within the state, no local autonomy. Ritual and administration are standardized. They tend to overflow the national boundaries and to assimilate the nations around: they proselytize and annex. » [Hocart 1970[1936]: 82]

What Hocart means by *the king* is virtually an archetype in C. G. Jung's sense of the term (see Jung 1970 [1955/56]: Chapter 4 on the archetype of "Rex" and "Regina;" see also Ludwig 2004 for a modern take on this issue). [14] What he is getting at is that there was a point in the history of a society before which the principal is more of a shaman [15] with headman or leadership qualities who guides people by charismatic attributes and ritual power—something like the classic South Pacific big-man (Sahlins 1963)—and after which, due to demographic or other pressures the structure flips to a hierarchical social organization in which the principal gains the power of governance while still retaining the spiritual power that accrues from his association with the ancestor spirits or gods. In other words, the universal organization of ritual in acephalous societies is a set-up for divine kingship in all its various forms. As the regulation of human affairs becomes more complex, the king's power becomes allocated to functionaries like sub-chiefs, nobles, tax collectors, judges, priests, healers, etc. At this point the king and his sub-chiefs and perhaps other functionaries like priests share in the responsibility over ritual increase (Hocart 1970[1936]: 102). Things have thus become so complicated that the king cannot operate as lone principal and requires an entire sub-society to carry out the functions of governance.

### **The Rise of the Bureaucratic State**

Inherent in Hocart's account of the evolution of governance is a profound critique of the bureaucratic state. Hocart's was a straightforward and simple insistence that the major role of consciousness in human affairs is the biological, social, and cultural quest for the good life (Hocart 1934b). People living in simple societies are no different than people living in complex societies in that they all want the same fundamental thing—life. The furtherance of that universal, instinctual desire may lead different peoples in different directions depending upon how they construct a technical and social adaptation to local contingencies. But underlying it all is a common inexorable process of development:

« [C]onscious purpose precedes the adaptation of behaviour, and the adaptation of behaviour is followed by adaptation of [institutional] structure. A community wants something; it shapes its actions so as to achieve that something, and the result of its action is to alter its organization. It is not indeed government that man wants, for how can he conceive of a government except by experience of it? It is life he wants, and in the effort to live he does one thing after another till he eventually finds himself governed, that is specialized into producers and into regulators of those producers. He does not want a priesthood or a civil service to control him; he wants to control nature for his own benefit; but in the pursuit of this aim he places some members of his community into new functions which in turn produce a new type of man, no longer the all-round handy man, but the man who lives largely by thinking. The conscious purpose is the impulse that sets the whole machinery in

motion with results that are not foreseen. » [Hocart 1970[1936]:299]

In the pursuit of the good life, the organization of the acephalous band and tribal society gradually develops a hierarchy—it loses that simpler horizontal organization typical of kin-based band, clan, moiety, and segmentary lineage systems and takes on the form of hierarchical officialdom. “Gradually the high rise higher, the low sink lower, until the state is rearranged in a vertical hierarchy such as ours” (Hocart 1970[1936]: 292). In ancient India this vertical structuring process resulted in a caste system (Hocart 1950). In each case of vertical structuration, the organization is grounded upon the society’s mythology and organized ritual. The high castes perform the necessary ritual functions, while the king is associated with the sun or some other high god. The social structure mirrors the cosmology in both its social roles and ritual activities. The contrast between acephalous societies and modern technocracies is stark:

« True it is that such [acephalous] societies cannot form big nations, maintain disciplined armies, lay networks of roads and railways, or suffer economic crises on a colossal scale, but they can exist, and quite successfully too, if success consists of survival with happiness. We cannot get on without a central government, because our society is so vast and complex that some coordinating system is needed, for each one has to cooperate with thousands whom he never sees, or even hears of. There are societies where everyone is related to everyone else; they have no need for a coordinating system. They work by mutual understanding. » [Hocart 1970[1936]: 128]

Within this pressure for coordination arises the process of specialization of governing role. People are taken into the government and taught to do jobs that no longer are carried out within and for the old kin-based system. Moreover, specialization becomes more and more constraining upon the individual’s own quest for life:

« As there is little specialization in the South Seas [true at the time of Hocart’s fieldwork], there is little discrepancy between a man’s work and his fitness for it. It is otherwise with us: a rivet-maker is far from being adapted to make nothing all day but rivets; still less is a cafeteria girl designed by nature to do nothing else but hand out knives and forks for hours on end. It follows that a very small part of their persons is exercised for one third of the day, and then it is exercised to excess. The great remainder is left hungering for activity till evening. It is the tragedy of our civilization: our men and women have not yet been narrowed down by nature to fit the narrowness of their tasks. ...The pursuit of life is no longer a wide all-embracing exercise, but an alternation of limited reactions. » [Hocart 1970[1936]: 297-298]

People in modern technocratic society are forced to adapt to roles that no longer fulfill that primal desire—the quest for the good life. Much of the pressure is unavoidable, for it is driven by demographics; as the population grows, the competition for the means of attaining the good life becomes more complicated, exclusionary and stressful. Somewhere along the line, the “coordinating system” (bureaucratic state, corporations, labor unions, political parties) absorbs more and more of the resources available to the society—it becomes as it

were a society within the society—and increasingly feeds its own needs, rather than the needs that gave rise to the institution in the first place. It ceases to carry out the prime functions that originally gave rise to the coordinating system, but because it is now institutionalized and worse, bureaucratized, it thwarts the existence of alternative organizations that might answer that primal need more directly and effectively. Those who wish to provide for themselves better protection than existing police forces are willing or able to provide are labeled *vigilantes* and are outlawed and ostracized. In the end, society becomes so fragmented and specialized that the result is the increasing alienation of the people who find their natural, innate quest for life thwarted and frustrated. This loss of control over the means to satisfy the quest for life leads (à la the psychology of W.H.R. Rivers) directly to psychodynamic conflict and suppression, and thereby results in alienation, depression, and psychopathology on a grand scale.

## Concluding Remarks

Hocart's integration of a holistic psychology and the study of social organization is one of the most insightful and creative pieces of ethnology ever constructed and he accomplished this understanding without ever losing sight of the real people he lived amongst. Hocart was inherently a phenomenologist—rather than asking people a lot of standard questions, he lived with them and listened to them in their own terms. Those interested in the history of anthropological theory need to be wary of authorities who, having perhaps a superficial understanding of Hocart's thought, class him as one of the early “diffusionists” (e.g., Stocking 1995: 223-228 *passim*). This is wrong-headed, for Hocart was critical of what he called the “sun cranks” [16] (e.g., the “hyperdiffusionism” of Eliot G. Smith, or even the later Rivers) and is better characterized as a psychological structuralist after the fashion of Adolf Bastian, but one who: (1) though he was well read in the neurosciences and physical anthropology of his day, had no way to empirically ground his notion of psychological structure, other than as instincts and needs, and (2) recognized that similarities among cultures may be due either to universal psychological structuration (he had no theory to hang this intuition upon) or to cultural diffusion (which was self-evident in many cases). He freely admitted that it was usually impossible to determine the exact origins of cultural similarities, much less the evolution of cultural forms. All one can do to support hypotheses pertaining to cultural similarities is rely on the best historical data available and avoid speculation.

Those familiar with Hocart's thinking may agree with me that Hocart was a researcher and theorist in search of the archetype. Reading his marvelous, but little-known work, *The Progress of Man: A Short Survey of His Evolution, His Customs and His Works* (1933), Hocart was clearly an evolutionist in the more modern sense in which he understood that the mind is fully embodied and that our species and its mental faculties has evolved. But because his psychological influences were Rivers and McDougall from the British side and Stumpf and Bastian from the German side, he could not get beyond the self-limiting concept of “instinct”—meaning biologically inherited action schema. C. G. Jung, on the other hand, broke out of that mold [17] and famously distinguished between the instincts and the

archetypes—as the instincts impel action in a distinctly human way, the archetypes impel us to perceive and understand the events to which we instinctively respond in a distinctly human way (Jung 1970: 87). For Jung instinct and archetype are two sides of the same unconscious coin (Jung 1968: 136-137, see also Laughlin and Tiberia 2012). It seems to me that Hocart was striving for this idea when he isolated the process of equating the ritual principal with the ancestor god and the subsequent universal properties of the divine king. Recall, if you will, that he was always reluctant to attribute universal customs only to diffusion—rather, he repeatedly emphasized there was no way of knowing the origins of similarities, aside from clear documentation and historical ethnography.

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[1] Levy-Bruhl (1975) later repudiated his earlier position.

[2] This article has been read widely by students of kinship structure, and has been reprinted in a number of anthologies (Hocart 1952a: 173-184; Hoebel 1955: 189-193).

[3] “Conning” is used here in the nautical sense of directing the course of a ship, as in “conning a schooner.”

[4] Compare Hocart’s suggestion that consciousness has a central role to play in the evolution and reorganization of the nervous system with that same hypothesis suggested decades later by one of our leading neuroanthropologists, Ralph Holloway (1974, 1995, 2008).

[5] Rivers was the first clinician to treat in a scientific way what would later become known as “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD); see his *Conflict and Dream* (Rivers 1923).

[6] Referring to psychologist, Alexander F. Shand (1858-1936); see Shand (1914).

[7] Hocart found the notion of “unconscious mind” perplexing: “The psychologists would now say [habitual functions] are carried on by the unconscious mind. I confess I can see no necessity for the word mind here. We do not ascribe an unconscious mind to the latest loom because it performs the most complicated operations unaccompanied by consciousness. ...There are unconscious processes; but let us not talk of an unconscious mind” (Hocart 1934b: 161).

[8] A term attributed by Hocart (1933: 145) to Sir Grafton Elliot Smith (1871–1937).

[9] Referring to the Koryaks who live on the coast of the Bering Sea, the Mandan Indians of North Dakota, and the Lango people of the East African savanna.

[10] In this respect, Hocart has much in common with modern day evolutionary psychologists (see Barkow et al. 1992). In today’s terms, we might say that ritual was a “pre-adaptation” or “exaptation” to governance. “The general structure which recurs over and over again must have been characteristic of the parent ritual: the quest for life, the exclusive ownership, heredity, the principal, the imitation, and equivalences, and so forth. We can then instruct our palaeontologist, the archaeologist, to seek confirmation. What he can produce at present is exceedingly meager” (Hocart 1970[1936]: 81).

[11] See Middleton and Tait (1958) for more examples from Africa.

[12] Futuna is one of the two Hoorn Islands (both now joined with Wallis Island in the western Polynesian grouping of Wallis and Futuna), while Rotuma is an island with outlying islets just north of Fiji.

[13] As I said, the principal can be either a person or an icon.

[14] Indeed, it is clear that Jung had read Hocart’s *Kings and Councillors* (Jung 1970 [1955/56]: 259, n. 1).

[15] Hocart rarely uses the term *shaman*.

[16] Quoting a 1927 letter from Hocart to A.C. Haddon; from Kuklick (1991: 128, n.13).

[17] Jung was also influenced by William McDougal who was one of Jung's analysands.