
Altered Consciousness in Society

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Human beings are remarkably social creatures, and the minds of developing infants take shape in interactions with other people, notably the main caretaker in the early months [see Granqvist, Reijman, & Cardena, Volume 2]. What may be less readily appreciated is the degree to which human consciousness is molded by culture, producing potentially lifelong changes that may require nothing less than a conversion experience to shift them in any fundamental way, so much so that one person's "normal state" may be someone else's "altered state." No account of altering consciousness in society would be complete without first discussing these enduring changes in consciousness, which are addressed in Part 1 of this chapter.

Human societies also employ instrumental means of producing temporary shifts in consciousness, and these too vary cross-culturally, in part because they are shifts from a culturally variable norm. These short-term changes are discussed in Part 2, followed by their relationship to social structure (Part 3) and social change (Part 4).

Culturally induced altered states in pre-industrial societies are commonly believed to be, and experienced as, spiritual in nature. Thus many pre-industrial societies are "polyphasic" (Laughlin, McManus, & d'Aquili, 1992), that is, they value altered states (ASC) as sacred and socially constructive, whereas the post-industrial West is "monophasic," that is, it exclusively valorizes a waking state that is assumed to be predominantly "rational." Culturally instituted ASC may be just as common in monophasic societies, but they are either not perceived as orthodox (for example, "speaking in tongues" is commonplace in charismatic but not Anglican churches) or are secularized (such as states induced by the social consumption of alcohol or the clinical use of hypnosis) or criminalized (as in the recreational use of drugs that are less traditional than—in the West—alcohol, caffeine, or tobacco). In Part 5, in the light of everything reviewed to that point, I discuss what we might infer about the nature of human spirituality.

Long-Term Alterations in Consciousness

Consciousness—the way we perceive and experience ourselves and the world—varies from one culture to another, often in quite bizarre ways. What seems bizarre to you, of course, depends on which culture you grew up in. If a Dorze warrior tells you that all the local leopards are devout Christians (Sperber, 1975, p. 3), you may well conclude that this person is deluded. But he will think the same of you if you tell him that there is no God and everything in the universe is meaningless and dead. Or, if a Temiar hunter tells you that the forest is full of spirits, and all people, animals, plants, mountains, and rivers have two souls (Jennings, 1995), you might think this is distinctly odd. But try telling him that there is no such thing as a soul or spirit, and that these are delusions created by chemicals in the brain—then the boot will be on the other foot. Each will think the other is deluded, and I happen to think you would both be right.

So why do human cultures cause such profound alterations in our minds? The best answer I can come up with is that such changes are, or were at one time, necessary to achieve the unique level of cooperation seen in human groups. Biologists call this “generalized altruism.” According to selfish gene theory, only two kinds of cooperation can evolve genetically: kin-based altruism (it pays to help close kin because they have many of the same genes as you: Hamilton, 1964) and reciprocal altruism (it pays to help someone who will help you in return; Trivers, 1971). But humans are capable of risking and sacrificing their lives to save complete strangers from whom they expect nothing in return. Biologists might be wrong, of course; incidents have been reported that suggest generalized altruism in dolphins and elephants (Bates et al., 2008), which might be explained by the evolution of empathy in social mammals. However, large-scale cooperation is uniquely human, and it may be no coincidence that all human societies have formal systems of inflated kinship (from clan membership to nationality) and reciprocity (economic exchange, for example).

To sustain such systems, all societies are necessarily governed by *rules* such as obligations (e.g., marriage) and prohibitions (e.g., the incest taboo), reinforced by material or supernatural sanctions. Rules, of course, exist to suppress or channel our “selfish” biological impulses in socially desirable ways. For this reason, human culture might be regarded as “anti-biological.”

Human systems of kinship and exchange have been associated with two quite distinct effects on consciousness. Classificatory kinship, for example, divides societies into lineage clans (Lévi-Strauss, 1949/1969). The clan you belong to is regarded as your “kin”: Every member in your

age group will be your “brothers” and “sisters,” their mothers will be your “mothers,” and so on. One or more other clans will be your “affines” (in-laws) and you and your siblings will marry someone from an affinal clan. Radcliffe-Brown (1931, p. 97), studying kinship in Australia, found that classificatory siblings have almost identical personalities. Mauss (1925/1967) notes that, in clan-based societies, individuals are identified with groups, groups themselves are regarded as “persons,” the gifts they exchange are perceived as continuous with the giver, and clan chiefs are conflated with their people, including dead ancestors and as-yet-unborn children. This expansion of the concept of personhood can take a form that Johansen (1954, p. 36) called “the kinship I.” For example, a Maori chief may relate the history and myths of his people using the first person singular pronoun throughout: referring to his ancestors not as “they” but as “I” and to mythic culture heroes such as Maui not as “he” but as “I.”

The economic systems of clan-based societies take the form of gift exchange (Mauss, 1925/1967). Egalitarian societies (those without formal leaders or social hierarchy) generally exchange like for like. If I give you a pig with a patch over one eye, then, after a suitably respectful delay, you must give me a pig with a patch over one eye. This must be a different pig; to give my own pig back to me would be a deeply insulting rejection of my gift. More complex and hierarchical societies have competitive exchange systems in which gifts are supposedly given in a spirit of generosity and respect, but the covert intent is self-promotion and the humiliation, degradation, or ruin of your rivals. The “monster child” (Mauss, 1925/1967) of gift exchange is the *potlatch* system of northwest coastal America. A chief would invite his rivals to a feast, at which “honored guests” would be forced to witness an orgy of wealth destruction. This would oblige them, at some future date, to reciprocate with an even more reckless destruction of their own wealth. Failure to fulfil one’s obligations in this relentless system would lead to “loss of face,” dishonor, and, ultimately, social exclusion.

Just as classificatory kinship involves inflated self-perceptions, so gift exchange is associated with fragmentation of the self. Leenhardt (1949/1979), for example, notes that Melanesians appear to have no coherent ego; rather, selfhood is defined in terms of multiple exchange relationships, as the hub of a wheel is defined by its spokes. Each relationship casts the person in a different role with a different set of attributes and attitudes. Because gifts are regarded as continuous with the giver, persons are further conceived as “partible” (Strathern, 1988).

Moreover, the “useless trade goods” exchanged in competitive systems are regarded as “persons” in their own right (Mauss, 1925/1967). They

have personal names, are believed to have human-like minds and emotions, and are held to be capable of articulate speech. The belief that non-human agents and objects have humanlike minds and motives is known as “animism.” The fact that gifts are regarded as persons suggests some linkage between animism and gift exchange.

Animism commonly incorporates another belief known as “perspectivism” (Viveiros de Castro, 1998). That is, nonhuman agents not only have humanlike personalities but also perceive themselves and the world from a human perspective. For example, a jaguar lapping the blood of its prey sees itself as a human drinking manioc beer; a vulture eating rotten meat sees maggots as grilled fish. And, just as animals see themselves as human, they see humans as animals, and such perceptions depend on relations of carnivory. Jaguars and spirits eat humans, so they perceive us as white-lipped peccaries (animals that humans eat). Conversely, white-lipped peccaries see humans as jaguars or spirits. Further, the way animals, spirits, and humans see each other is not thought of as a matter of appearance versus reality: All these conflicting perceptions *are* realities. All beings live in a multitude of parallel universes, playing a different role in each, determined by the entity whose perspective creates that particular universe. Significantly, “other” humans, including affines, are seen as animal, and it seems likely that perspectivism is interlinked with the perspectival relationships of classificatory kinship (Viveiros de Castro, 1999): My kin will see me as “human” while my affines will see me as “animal”; and since sex is equated with “eating,” these perceptions likewise depend on relations of “carnivory.” Incest equates with cannibalism and both are regarded as abhorrent.

Paradoxically, perspectival worldviews frequently include the belief that animals are actually humans wearing animal suits. This belief persists in hunting communities that regularly butcher meat, so it would seem that animal costume transforms the human all the way through to the bones. When a human dons an animal mask or costume in ritual, this is not thought to conceal a human identity, but to create an animal one. A perennial fear in people with such beliefs is of meeting an animal in human form. If the animal greets the person, and the person—mistaking the animal for a human—responds, then the person will be instantly transformed into an animal of that species (Viveiros de Castro, 1998). Shape-shifting is not regarded as something miraculous but as an accident waiting to happen. For people with such beliefs, there is no essential body. Selfhood is perceived as profoundly unstable and readily transformed by a simple change of appearance or attitude.

In sum, I have so far suggested that the emergence of large-scale cooperation in humans required formal systems of expanded kinship and reciprocity and that such systems in clan-based societies are commonly associated with inflated, fragmented, and mutable selfhood as well as culturally obfuscated views of reality. This raises the question of *how* these alterations in perception, belief, and experience are accomplished.

It would be a mistake to suppose that cultural beliefs and attitudes are transmitted from one generation to the next entirely or even mainly by word of mouth. The whole way of life of a people conditions the sentiments and perceptions of its members. The anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1972/1977), for example, has shown that merely to walk through a Kabuli house is an object lesson in gender relations. The man's room, where he greets and entertains visitors, is raised above the level of the rest of the house. His chair is beside the fireplace, with his gun, signifying his importance, leaning nearby. The woman's kitchen is down a few steps and continuous with the place where animals are stabled. Among the Sambia in New Guinea, women and men move through the village along separate paths. Sambian houses are divided into a man's space and a woman's. If a woman trespasses in a man's space or on a male path, she will pollute her husband or other men, causing them to fall sick or die, and would be regarded as a thoroughly "bad woman" (Herdt, 1987).

One important factor that distinguishes humans from other animals and seems likely to influence self-perceptions is sexual modesty, which appears to be a cultural universal (Knight, 1991). A male chimpanzee, desiring to mate with a female, need only show his erect penis to indicate his interest. This would not be acceptable in any known human society, at least not in public. Though nudity may be obligatory in certain ceremonial or sacred contexts, human genitals are normally concealed—even in the heat of the Kalahari Desert, where the Bushmen do not wear clothes for comfort. Occasionally genitals may be emphasized, as in New Guinea, where men wear penis sheaths, or in the Ida festival, where men wear artificial vaginas on their heads (Gell, 1975), but they are never displayed in the natural manner of chimpanzees.

No other species systematically alters the sensory qualities of bodies in so many culturally variable and ingenious ways as *Homo sapiens* (Power, 2010; Whitehead, 2010), including dress, coiffure, jewellery, cosmetics, body paint, soap, perfume, tattooing, cicatrization (making patterns of welts on the flesh by tiny knife cuts), and frank mutilation. Many of these alterations of the body are accomplished in or for ritual, and ritual is a major institutional means of altering consciousness. Rituals are sacred performances, commonly involving song, dance, pantomime, and the

manipulation of sacred objects or images. Wearing animal costumes and pretending to be animals occurs in rites on every inhabited continent, and this is likely to be an ancient feature of animistic ritual. People generally *believe* in the potency of their rituals and, apparently, believe they can be truly transformed into animals. Such wholly-believed-in make-believe may well explain the origin of animism and perspectivism, and it implicates not only role-play (the ability to pantomime) but suggestibility. The capacity to pretend and to conform to group beliefs would appear to be prerequisites for human culture and essential if people are to believe in patent fictions of the kind noted above.

European folktales, including many of the bedtime stories we read to our children, often feature talking animals and animal/human transformations. These tales reflect the perspectival worldview that once prevailed in pre-Christian Europe (Napier, 1985). Indeed, the Western scientific worldview seems to have evolved through a series of reactions against perspectivism (Whitehead, 2010). Examples include the proscription of graven images in the Ten Commandments, the emphasis on the spiritual essentialism of the individual in Islam and Christianity, and the physicalist notion of a universe that can be entirely understood without reference to consciousness.

Although the scientific method is designed to overcome personal and cultural bias, as a political institution dependent on public respect, research funding, and job security, science tends to preserve cultural biases that support its own authority—such as individualism and the valuation of work over play—and even generates new ones of its own: notably physicalism, mentioned above. So many of the most basic “scientific” assumptions are as much the result of cultural obfuscation as are animistic and perspectival belief systems.

Temporary Alterations in Consciousness

Many emotional and autonomic expressions, such as laughter and yawning, are contagious. That is, if other people are laughing or yawning, you are likely to do the same. Social contagion of this kind is common to many animals (Brown, 1991). In humans, a study has shown a positive relationship between emotional contagion and experiential features of hypnotizability, suggesting that aspects of hypnosis that are common to other altered states—such as dissociation (partial or complete isolation of one mental process from another)—may have a social origin or serve social functions (Cardena, Terhune, Lööf, & Buratti, 2009).

Another phenomenon that humans share with many higher animals, beside the daily sleep–wake cycle, is the “basic rest–activity cycle.” In humans, this is called the “daydream cycle,” because we know that we are daydreaming during these periods of relaxation. Human daydreaming tends to recur at approximately 90-minute intervals that appear to be continuous with our REM sleep cycle, REM being the sleep phase when dreaming is most continuous (Brown, 1991, p. 95). In humans, the daydream cycle has become adapted to serve a social function. It coincides with the so-called “chat cycle” that occurs during free-flowing human conversation. At 90-minute intervals, human conversation becomes particularly absorbing, spontaneous, and enjoyable. The same phenomenon occurs in other forms of free-flowing human co-action and is characterized by physiological rapport uniting the group. That is, physiological indices—such as heart rate, respiratory rate, pupil diameter, lip pallor, skin conductivity, and galvanic muscle response—tend to converge among participants in the group activity (Brown, 1991, pp. 46, 220). Rapport is an essential precondition for hypnotic induction. The daydream state itself resembles a hypnotic condition, when humans are most suggestible [see Kokoszka & Wallace, Volume 2].

These cyclical changes in consciousness are part of our biological heritage. Human cultures, however, have institutional methods of altering consciousness that exploit this heritage. Durkheimian anthropologists believe that all the “antibiological” features of human culture were initially generated in ritual. Certainly all known human societies have rituals, sacred or otherwise, and rituals are uniquely suited to exploiting human capacities of dissociation and suggestibility.

Following an extensive study of rituals in India, Arnold van Gennep (1909/1960) concluded that all rituals are *rites of passage*, because they accompany or accomplish social transitions. *Life crisis rites* mark changes of state or station in the lives of individuals: birth, initiation, marriage, election to office, illness, and death. *Calendrical rites* mark the passage of society as a whole from one season to the next. Van Gennep further showed that rituals typically involve three phases: a *separation* phase in which people are formally separated from the everyday world of mundane activity; a *transitional* phase during which the intended transformation is accomplished; and an *incorporation* phase, or return to the mundane world transformed.

The *transitional* phase takes place in a kind of limbo, a betwixt-and-between world that van Gennep called “liminal” (from Latin *limen*, meaning “margin”). In the liminal phase of life crisis rites, the normative social order is usually suspended. During initiation, for example, all signs of

status or rank are removed. The novitiates may be stripped naked, painted with mud or black pigment, and declared to be “invisible.” In calendrical rites, on the other hand, there is commonly a Saturnalian inversion of the normative order, with the humble temporarily elevated to dominate the powerful. Or again, if cannibalism is regarded as abhorrent in the everyday world, it becomes a sacrament during ritual—whether real cannibalism, as among the Avatip in New Guinea (Harrison, 1993), or make-believe cannibalism, as in Christian communion. The same can apply to incest. Among the Eskimos, the whole of the winter was regarded as “ritual time.” Married partners were separated, and sexual intercourse took place between “incestuous” couples (Rasmusson, 1976).

Victor Turner (1969) coined the term “anti-structure” to describe the transitional topsy-turveydom of the liminal phase of ritual. However, he pointed out that in secular Western societies, where ritual participation is no longer mandated by awesome spiritual potencies, the anti-structural functions of religion have been taken over by the subjunctive “what if?” of leisure activities: entertainment, recreation, and the cultural arts (Turner, 1982). Without such anti-structural episodes, Turner believed, postindustrial societies could not continue to function. The theory of anti-structure holds that human life alternates between the structural role play of everyday life and the anti-structural role play of ritual or recreational activity. Furthermore, conflicts created by the inevitable contradictions within social structure cause friction, disputes, and “social dramas,” increasing entropy within the system. Anti-structural phases are necessary to maintain, repair, and reinvigorate human social orders. Also, when shifting circumstances require adaptive change in the normative system, anti-structural processes are again required; they are the source of new culture.

Transformation and revitalization may be the principal functions of ASC, which frequently show a striking parallel to van Gennep’s three ritual phases. Sleep, for example, is bracketed by hypnagogic and hypnopompic experiences. Several authors (Bateson, 1955; Huizinga, 1955; Jennings, 1995; Schechner, 1977; Turner, 1982; Winnicott, 1974) have noted that childhood play, in line with van Gennep’s transformative phase of ritual, takes place in a “transitional space” where the rules or demands of everyday reality are suspended. They also note that this is essential to enculturation. Childhood itself might be regarded as a “transitional space”—an extended period of irresponsibility in which children, shielded from the demands of adult society and survival, are free to explore and expand their own developmental possibilities and the affordances of the society and culture into which they have been born.

All social play requires a shift in perception. For example, a play fight should not be confused with a real fight. Make-believe play in particular is dependent on dissociation, since two views of reality, one perceived and the other invented, must not be confused (Leslie, 1987). A child pretending that stones are sweets should not swallow the stones, mistaking them for sweets. Without dissociative ability, pretend play could hardly have evolved as it has. Perhaps the most signal achievement of human beings has been the discovery of institutional means of inducing collective anti-structural states, exploiting our innate powers of make-believe, dissociation, and suggestibility in the service of large-scale cooperation [see Cardena & Alvarado, this Volume].

Spiritual Experience and Social Structure

Spiritual experiences—often referred to as “religious experiences” or “REs”—are altered states during which people feel and believe that they are in contact with some kind of sentient “otherness,” whether perceived as “God,” “nature,” “the universe,” “all humankind,” or some other natural or supernatural force or agency [see Beauregard, Volume 2]. Scientific investigation of REs began in the late nineteenth century, most famously by William James (1902/1985), who coined the term *noetic* to describe their revelatory quality, “feeling states” that are simultaneously “knowledge states.” Rudolf Otto (1917/1926) referred to their *numinous* character—inspiring feelings of supernatural awe and wonder.

More systematic and statistical studies were pioneered by Alister Hardy (1979) and his successors. Many people found the results surprising. Even in the secular West, between a third and a half of the population has had at least one spiritual experience (Wulff, 2000). Furthermore, agnostics and atheists are as likely to have them as the devoutly religious, and they are slightly more common in better-educated or relatively well-adjusted individuals. Apparently, REs cannot be attributed to psychological compensation in the distressed or socially deprived (the “opium of the people” hypothesis).

REs can have dramatic effects on those who experience them—people may abandon a prosperous business career to devote their energies to charitable work, take up art, or pursue some other newly discovered passion. There may be a conversion from atheism to religious faith, or—rarely—from faith to atheism (Hardy, 1979). A common consequence is that the person becomes more tolerant of and caring toward others, more spontaneous and energetic, less fearful of the future, and far less

dependent on external supports for self-esteem such as wealth, praise, power, status, or fame. Although spiritual experiences are culturally variable, there also appear to be cross-cultural parallels, notably the encounter with sentient “otherness,” the sense of something bigger than the self, and common if not universal features such as transcending time or space.

The prevalence and quality of REs correlate inversely with social complexity. Whereas many Westerners have one or more REs during their lives, in more egalitarian societies almost everyone may have comparable experiences, and may do so once or twice a week. Some aboriginal peoples hear spirit voices every day and claim to receive useful knowledge and advice from them (Krippner, 1999).

Erika Bourguignon (1973) has compared the use of institutionalized ASC in 488 societies, that is, most of the societies for which we have any kind of ethnographic information at all. In contrast to the “monophasic” West, 90% of the societies in Bourguignon’s sample had one or more forms of institutionalized ASC, usually in ritual or religious contexts. A major category involves the experience of leaving the body and journeying to other places, either in this world or in some spiritual otherworld. For want of a better term, I will call such experiences “*shamanic trance*” [see Winkelman, this volume].

A shamanic trance is a voluntary and conscious state, clearly remembered afterward, in which the experient encounters supernatural entities or explores the natural or supernatural world, often with a view to achieving specific goals such as healing the sick, finding game, or conducting the souls of the dead to the underworld (Furst, 1977). A possession altered state, in contrast, is an involuntary and (at least reportedly) unconscious state in which a supernatural entity invades or “rides” the body, displacing the person’s typical personality.

Bourguignon found that shamanic states occur most frequently in the most egalitarian and least stratified societies, whereas possession states are most frequent in complex and highly stratified societies. Complex societies frequently have a central religion linked to the central apparatus of social control, along with peripheral cults that are much more autonomous. In Brazil, for example, the central religion is Roman Catholicism, and peripheral cults include Umbanda and the Ayahuasca Church. Both types of religion can have possession practices. Central possession trance tends to be highly exclusive (only the legitimate priesthood can do it) and conservative (dedicated to maintaining the *status quo*). Peripheral cults tend to be more or less subversive since they provide an alternative source of spiritual authority that cannot be directly controlled by any kind of centralized government.

Where possession may occur independently of any ritual context, it commonly serves to coerce support from more dominant others and has been described as a “weapon of the weak” (Lewis, 1989). For example, if a Sri Lankan wife is abused by her all-powerful husband, she can greatly improve her lot by becoming possessed by an unruly demon. Since all her actions when possessed are deemed to be beyond her control, she can embarrass her husband by behaving like a prostitute, shouting obscenities, and offering to copulate with all comers. The offending husband is then forced to hire exorcists and host a very expensive public exorcism, in which the wife’s problems will be ventilated and the husband obligated to improve his behavior in order to prevent any demonic relapse (Kapferer, 1991).

Shamanic states vary with political inequality. In the most egalitarian societies—simple foragers and agriculturalists—they are much more democratic. Almost anyone is deemed capable of experiencing them and many seek them, use them to heal others, and so on (Jennings, 1995; Katz, 1982). With increasing degrees of gender or age-grade inequality, altered states becomes more the exclusive domain of one gender and/or specialized practitioners [see Winkelma, this volume].

The inverse relationship between the incidence and richness of spiritual experience and the complexity and inequity of social structure is consistent with Turner’s theory of anti-structure. Conceivably, we may be having spiritual experiences all the time, but some kind of imposed structure excludes this from everyday consciousness.

Social Change, Social Movements, and Charismatic Leadership

Victor Turner (1982) observed that, just as art imitates life, so life imitates art. He inferred that the structural role play of the “social drama” and the anti-structural role play of the stage or ritual drama feed on and into each other in an endless cycle, and this is the engine of conflict resolution that maintains social stability or, when necessary, generates social change. Among the evidence reviewed by Turner, he cites research by Brian Sutton-Smith (1972) into phases of order and disorder in children’s and other games. Sutton-Smith inferred that disorder, for which he borrowed Turner’s term “anti-structure,” is the melting pot out of which all new culture emerges [see St John, this volume].

Psychological theories of creativity also implicate disorderly, nonrational, or playful processes: divergent thought, thinking outside the box, conceptual blending, humor, daydreaming, REM sleep, and so on. Otto

Rank (1932/1989, p. 368) described creativity as an “assumptions breaking process,” and Michael Apter (2008) advanced a psychological parallel to Turner’s theory. In his “reversal theory,” Apter contrasts goal-directed thought (*telic*) with playful, self-motivated, thought (*paratelic*) and points out that the former cannot arrive at anything new because linear reasoning always remains trapped within its own premises. Playful thought, in contrast, conflates categorical oppositions and follows multiple non-rational paths, leading to serendipitous discoveries and novel ideas and concepts that could never have been predicted from a habitual set of fixed assumptions. Great ideas are never products of logic, but come “out of the blue” when not thinking purposefully at all, famous examples being Archimedes in his bath, Kekulé in his reverie, and Newton seeing an apple fall. Dreaming and daydreaming may be the most valuable work a scientist ever does.

Ongoing social change is not necessarily noticed as such by group members, who may think they are being faithful to a primordial template ordained in the mythic past by their revered ancestors (cf. Morphy, 1989). However, quite dramatic changes do occur, and these too always depend on ASC. Among shamanic peoples, all new ideas—new songs, dances, cures, technologies, and customs—are “given” to an individual in visions, dream visitations, or ritual trance states (Biesele, 1993; Jennings, 1995, pp. 139, 176–178; Roseman, 1991, pp. 52–79; Stephen, 1979). A striking case occurred among a group of Temiar aborigines who happened to live close to the edge of the rainforest, where they came into frequent contact with Malays. Following an influenza epidemic, crop failure, and worsening relations with Malays, who disapproved of the Temiars’ non-Islamic lifestyle, a highly respected healer received in a dream a new song and dance known as *Chinchem*, along with an entire system of reforms, including avoidance of eating pork and covering women’s breasts in public (Noone, 1939). The result was a considerable improvement in relations and trading opportunities with their Malay neighbors.

Colonialism commonly involves severe tension between immigrant and indigenous populations. One recurring response to a colonial presence is the appearance of a cargo cult, most commonly in Melanesia and Micronesia, but also in South America and elsewhere (BurrIDGE, 1960; Lawrence, 1964; Worsley, 1970). Typically, a charismatic prophet receives a revelatory vision or message from the sacred world that informs him that the cargos of wonderful goods delivered to the colonists are actually gifts from the ancestors, intended for their indigenous descendants or for all people to share equally but cunningly appropriated by the superior magic and greed of the foreigners. The aim of the cult is to get

the ancestors to realize what is going on and redirect the cargo to the proper beneficiaries. One way of doing this is to copy the colonial “magic,” which might include such potent rituals as taking afternoon tea.

Cargo cult activity in the Pacific increased greatly during and after World War II, when vast quantities of military goods and supplies passed through the islands. In the earliest cargo cults, the faithful would build wooden jetties where the ancestral ships could dock, but recent cults built airstrips, control towers, wooden headphones and radios with bamboo aerials, and “decoy” aeroplanes made out of timber, palm thatch, and bark, bound with vines (Burrige, 1960). They mimicked the landing signals used by ground staff and at night lit signal fires and torches to mark out the landing strip, all to attract the expected flood of riches from their bountiful ancestors.

Quite dramatic alterations of consciousness are common in cargo cults. Participants whirl, shake, dance, chant, foam at the mouth, or couple promiscuously in a frenzied attempt to attract the desired cargo (Burrige, 1960). The Vailala Madness, one of the earliest well-documented cargo cults, gained its name from the behavior of its followers, which included speaking in tongues, fits of shaking, and similar phenomena (Worsley, 1970).

Although the beliefs of cargo cultists are clearly based on a cultural misperception, their motivations are human universals: demands for recognition, dignity, equality, and justice. People who have a traditional ideology of giving and sharing cannot understand why White people, who have so much when they have so little, show no impulse to redress this inequity in a manner perceived as normal and human. Burrige (1960), following his own fieldwork in Melanesia, believed that cargo cults might provide useful insights into more dramatic social upheavals such as the French and Russian revolutions.

Cargo cults exemplify a broader class of messianic, millenarian, or nativistic movements, having much in common with the Ghost Dance cults of North American and prophetic movements in Africa (Burrige, 1960). Jack Wilson (formerly Wavoka) has left us his own account of the vision in which he was given the Ghost Dance (Mooney, 1896). Wilson met God face to face in Heaven. There he saw his ancestors enjoying their favorite pastimes and a beautiful land filled with game. God instructed him on what to teach his people. They must love each other, work hard, and live in peace with Whites. They must not steal, lie, or fight and must forego the self-mutilation associated with mourning the dead. Wilson was convinced that if all Indians observed God’s teachings and performed the 5-day Ghost Dance at the prescribed intervals, there would be no

disease or old age, and the dead would be reunited with the living. The entire Earth would be renewed, swept clean, and filled with food, happiness, and love.

As the Ghost Dance spread widely across the American West, some interpretations acquired a more militant character, notably with the introduction of the Ghost Shirts. These garments, often decorated with birds, turtles, stars, and other spiritually important motifs, were believed to render the wearer bulletproof. Despite the peaceful nature of Jack Wilson's original message, the "crazy" dancing spread alarm among U.S. authorities, which culminated in the massacre of more than 200 Lakota Sioux at Wounded Knee in 1890 (Brown, 1970).

An earlier nativistic movement among the Iroquois, led by the Seneca prophet Handsome Lake, influenced Anthony Wallace's (1956) theory of revitalization movements, which he defined as a "deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture" (p. 265). Wallace, based on cross-cultural studies, theorized that these politico-religious movements are responses to severe stress caused by colonial, racial, or class oppression. They are usually founded by a spiritually inspired prophet or charismatic leader who predicts an imminent transformation of the world order, elimination of oppression, restoration of traditional values, and freedom from want. In Wallace's view, all the "higher religions," including Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity, originated as revitalization movements.

Egalitarian societies, by definition, lack leaders and resist any attempt by one person to dominate others (Erdel & Whiten, 1994; Katz, 1982; Jennings, 1995), although respected healers—those perceived as having outstanding abilities to deal with spiritual agencies—might be thought of as "charismatic" and can initiate social change, as in the Temiar case reported by Noone (1939). Max Weber (1978, p. 242) defined charisma, which he regarded as a chaotic phenomenon devoid of purpose or meaning, as "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities." Émile Durkheim took the contrary view that charisma is not some property of an extraordinary individual but rather is projected onto an individual by his or her followers. "Theatrical theories" such as Durkheim's make charisma a two-way relationship; the audience bestows the role onto the leader, and the leader acts the part accordingly. The power that the charismatic individual appears to exert is the result of "collective effervescence," a state of transcendent excitement that occurs "whenever people are put into closer and more active relations with one another" (Durkheim, 1912/

1965, pp. 240–241). The experience of the sacred, in Durkheim's view, is the sense of transcendent liberation resulting from surrendering the egoistic biological self to a larger collective reality.

On the other hand, it is certainly true that there are exceptional individuals who are more likely to become charismatic leaders than others. Genealogical research (Horrobin, 1998) shows that pronounced negative and positive traits occur repeatedly in specific human lineages. Individuals with schizophrenia and manic depression are regularly found in the same family descent groups as individuals with outstanding talents, including mathematical, scientific, and artistic ability, intense religious faith, and charismatic leadership. Charismatic leaders are of course always regarded by their followers as exceptional, but what is so regarded is culturally variable. It can be the case that the leader has exceptional energy, determination, courage, or fanaticism, or it could be virtually anything that seems "strange" such as epilepsy, behavior outside local norms, or, especially where children are regarded as prophets, pure simplicity and innocence (Wilson, 1975, p. 29).

The literature on charisma lacks any consensus. There are so many divergent and conflicting views that one begins to wonder whether *charisma* refers to anything real or, perhaps, to a multiplicity of disparate phenomena. Is it appropriate to apply the same word to Buddha, Christ, or Jack Wilson, and also to Adolf Hitler, Charles Manson, or Osama bin Laden? One difference between messengers of love and messengers of hate is that the former do not attempt to win converts (Ravindra, 2004). They preach only to "those who have ears to hear," those who are actively seeking greater spiritual development and guidance. The more malignant forms of charisma occur in persons who are distinctly manipulative and seek to exert power over others. Whatever charisma may ultimately prove to be, Durkheim's "collective effervescence," Weber's "meaningless" phenomenon, and Marx's "opium of the people," clearly implicate anti-structural processes with unpredictable consequences and potential for creativity and change.

Final Thoughts

In this chapter, I have reviewed some of the evidence that the plasticity of the human mind, its capacity for both enduring and transient alterations of consciousness, is a core prerequisite for human social and cultural functioning. While discussing long-term changes in consciousness, however, I did not speculate about the kind of consciousness we might have

if *not* changed by culture. The fact that so many ASC are experienced as numinous, noetic, and *spiritual* is particularly intriguing. Did human religiousness evolve genetically, is it a product of culture, or is there perhaps a third alternative? Genealogical evidence (Horrobin, 1998) implicates some genetic influence on religiousness, while research in epileptic patients suggests that religious ideation may be hard wired in the temporal lobes (Ramachandran & Blakeslee, 1998, 175–177, 179–188, 285n–286n). Some cultural and cognitive anthropologists have proposed that religion might be explained by a genetically evolved “symbolic module” (Sperber, 1994), “neurognostic processes” (Laughlin et al., 1992) or a hominid “mimetic controller” (Winkelman, 2002). Social anthropologists, on the other hand, are more inclined to adopt the Durkheimian view that ritual is the necessary precursor of human culture, including religion. Different again are those scientists who (often covertly) hold spiritual beliefs (Barušs, 2008). For them, spirit has a much more profound ontological status. Such divergent views, however, may not be mutually incompatible.

When observing Ndembu initiation rites, Victor Turner (1969) noted that, after all signs of personal distinction had been removed, and following a series of painful and humbling ordeals, the novitiates entered a state of intimate unity which he called *communitas*, in contrast to the normative state of everyday living which he called *societas*. The *communitas* state suggested to him a solution to an apparent paradox. Why is it, he asked, that people claim to discover “truth” in the world of artifice and pretence created by ritual (1982, p. 114) or by theatre and art (pp. 115–116)? The answer, he suggested, is that the actor dons a mask to expose the false mask of *societas*. Anti-structural genres cut through the “hypocrisy of culture.” The structured world of everyday life is itself artificial, but the “truth” experienced by artists, mystics, and others is some kind of bedrock reality. This cannot be a cultural product. Turner (1982, pp. 113–114) cites Burrige (1979) on the protoindividual that can become apparent in ritual liminality, and, in his earlier work (1969, p. 128), claims that, in the productions of prophets and artists, “we may catch glimpses of that unused evolutionary potential in mankind which has not yet been externalised and fixed in structure.” Ritually induced *communitas* is a spontaneous phenomenon, not something scripted into the traditional formalities of ritual. The suspension of *societas* enables people to experience something *for themselves*, not something they have acquired from their ancestors by cultural transmission. It is a discovery rather than an invention.

Elsewhere, however, he implies that it is not genetically determined either. Turner (1969, p. 128) avers that *communitas*, even though it surely involves a release of instinctual energies, cannot be reduced to anything

precultural such as a primordial “herd instinct.” In the several cultures that Turner examined, he found that what is universally valued in spontaneous *communitas* is honesty, openness, humility, equality, mutual forgiveness, freedom from pretensions, indifference to wealth, sexual restraint, and goodwill to all humankind. Such absolute selflessness, as I explained in section 1, is difficult to account for in exclusively genetic terms. Humans certainly have a remarkably thorough ability to identify with others: When we enjoy a novel or a movie, for example, we identify with the protagonists to such an extent that we care what happens to them almost as though it were happening to ourselves. Many authors have pointed out the continuity between storytelling and role play (Whitehead, Marchant, Craik, & Frith, 2009). Children role play just about anything that moves, and this is probably sufficient to account for our ability to “put ourselves in others’ shoes” (cf. Mead, 1934/1974). However, human cruelty also involves empathy, though not sympathy, and it is a far cry from enjoying a novel to *communitas* or the “oceanic” experience of mysticism. Turner notes the universalizing tendency of *communitas* and the cross-cultural appeal of spiritual teachings such as “goodwill to all humankind.” He expressly equates *communitas* with the sense of union, with nature, humankind, God, the cosmos, and so forth, which occurs in mysticism and the “flow” experiences of athletes, gamblers, and others when totally absorbed and at one with the activity they are engaged in (Csikszentmihalyi, 1974).

Perhaps wisely, Turner avoids saying anything that might rouse the book-burning passions of the Senior Editor of *Nature* (cf. Anonymous [actually Maddox], 1981). But what Turner says implicates a “third force” affecting human behavior, something that is neither cultural nor exclusively genetic, but that transcends both. He also makes one particularly important point about *communitas*: it captures “the winged moment as it flies” (Turner, 1969, p. 132). *Communitas* is about the here and now, in contrast to *societas*, which is trapped in fossilized pasts, sedimented routines, and anxieties for the future. Yet *communitas* exists in contrast rather than in opposition to *societas* (1982, pp. 50–51). The two belong together in a figure-and-ground gestalt, or like yin and yang locked in an eternal dynamic of interaction. Without the one, there could not be the other. Nature has enriched us with the gift of self-determination, but in doing so, it has burdened us with the tribulations of self-consciousness. Reflectivity alienates us from ourselves by making us concerned about ourselves. It enables, even compels, us to live in our context-independent memories and plans for tomorrows that may never come. So we have lost the immediacy of our own lived realities. As D. H. Lawrence (1936) put it,

we humans paint pictures of ourselves, then live according to the picture instead of from our spontaneous selves. This is “living from the outside in” and “truly the reversal of life.”

Living in the spontaneous here and now is the central message of the Sermon on the Mount and all the great spiritual traditions that we know. Freedom from the self-obsessed *ego* turns people into “fountains of living waters.” Ravi Ravindra (2004), comparing the gospel of John with Indian mysticism, notes how Christ compares spirit to the wind: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). Turner notes that monastic institutions—and even Marxism—that attempt to make of *communitas* a permanent state always fail, because institutions cannot persist without structure. Professor Ravindra (2005), in a keynote conference paper, commented: “Formal religions have very little to do with spirituality.”

Human culture, for all the wrong reasons, including collective fictions and perceptual distortions, gave us the means to become free from our self-conscious selves, enabling us to discover our own spirituality. One might think that the suspension of cultural structure, and with it release from the fetters of self-consciousness, *ought* to return us to some primordial monkey-like condition, truly spontaneous perhaps, but dominated by the “tyranny of selfish genes.” But it does not. Rather, it accords a glimpse of *what we might become*. The idea that a state valuing pure selflessness could be arrived at by gradualistic steps seems logically incoherent to me, and even more so that this could be accomplished by selfish-gene mechanisms alone. Even the most trenchant physicalist must surely acknowledge at least that spirituality is an emergent phenomenon, irreducible to psychopharmacology.

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