

## Chapter 3

### Anthropos through the looking-glass: or how to teach the Balinese to bark

So much has been said to so little avail about rationality that to add to it would be pretty pointless. However a curious document has come my way which suggests that disquisitions on rationality reveal more about their authors than about what they claim to speak. I quote briefly.

Sometimes the Tsew really appear backward. Their utter conviction in their superiority can be very straining on an outsider; for they use every opportunity to compare others unflatteringly with themselves. While they display a shrewd mercantile flair, no small technical ingenuity and awesome military might, it is the manner by which they justify their prowess which mystifies one not born with their assumptions and mode of reasoning. Nretsew peoples are thought to excel in the finest human attribute, being *laniotar*, or *Ar* in common parlance. This quality above all they asseverate to be the cause of their success. According to the learned elders *Ar* is so important in Nretsew life that they define humanity by its possession and animality by its absence. I suspect my dilatory and uncertain grasp of this concept has given them ground to doubt whether I am indeed truly human. For unless one is *Ar*, it transpires one cannot understand what it is.

Today was most depressing. As the Tsew constantly invoke *Ar* to account for every institution from agricultural practice to moral injunctions, I returned to trying to understand it. The priests to whom I spoke quite failed to see how contradictory I found their ideas about *Ar*. For humans are defined by *Ar*, but some are more so than others. Not being *Ar* enough opens one to ridicule; and tens of thousands of Tsew have been incarcerated by their fellows, often until death, on the charge of lacking *Ar*. The quality of *Ar* is inferred from speech and action by the priests, but while these persons epitomize this highest of virtues, the same priests are widely treated with contempt by many. Traditionally the truth about *Ar* was revealed by the two great Culture Heroes, Otalp and Eltotsira, who it seems agreed on little else. Texts in esoteric language abound and sects proliferate, each professing the true interpretation and using it to refute the others. Foolishly I remarked that, as every sect's criteria were

different, they might argue at cross-purposes for ever, only to be told scornfully that this showed I did not understand *Ar*. Surely it is inconsistent for each priest to boast an idiolect and disagree with all others, but unite to insist there to be only one true *Ar*.

Squabbles break out constantly. For instance, in the Order of Srenildrah, a young apostate, Sekul, was caught coping with the ambiguities of *Ar*, by preaching that it was of two kinds, *Arwan* and *Artu*. The magnitude of the heresy was brought to light by the archpriest Silloh who reaffirmed the doctrine that there could be only one true *Ar*, because this was the necessary condition of thought itself. This peroration was though promptly criticized by another, Htims Notwen, who opined that the necessity of *Ar* derived from it being the condition of effective action.

When challenged, however, Nretsew priests often resort to arguments of a quite different order. They affirm categorically that the world could not make sense without *Ar*; or point to the material superiority of the Tsew as proof of *Ar*; the very flexibility of their argumentation itself being further proof that...

At this juncture the text, which appears to be a kind of ethnographic diary, gradually becomes unintelligible. Later entries suggest that the anonymous author succumbed to drink, a fate one gathers popular in that culture.<sup>1</sup>

### **We hold these truths to be self-evident**

Recent work on rationality is not unlike a hall of mirrors: it is a dazzling display of possibility - and improbability. Each reflection is so life-like and incontrovertible, and comes framed in its own style of erudition. The trouble is there are so many versions, each right, that one is faced with a surfeit of certitudes, each different. The profusion can hardly be explained away as a matter of interpretation or perspective; for each account claims to state the true and necessary way things are. If there be, as is mooted, a universal 'common core' of rationality and shared perceptions, which vary only according to the 'logic of the situation' (Horton 1982: 257), the diversity of views suggests there are as many situations, or logics, as there are authors. The predicament,

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Miner (1956) for drawing my attention to the possible existence of the Tsew.

read carefully, is that of the Tseu. For how, so to speak, is one sure that what one sees is windows on the world not oneself in mirrors? To continue the metaphor, the only way of knowing is to try to smash through the mirrors to whatever lies beyond. To dally may be to meet the fate of that famous armchair introvert who

‘...weaves by night and day  
A magic web with colours gay.  
She has heard a whisper say,  
A curse is on her if she stay  
To look down on Camelot.’<sup>2</sup>

### **Reason and its discontents**

My recourse to metaphor might seem out of place in discussing rationality. Talk of mirrors is not a mere conceit though. For abstract notions like reason tend to be portrayed figuratively through metaphors which are hidden, or are far from as dead as they seem. I wish to explore here some of the presuppositions behind the imagery and consider how far assertions about the universality of rationality are a matter of fashion and cultural style. The point may be made by comparing received wisdom on reason and logic with Balinese ideas and use. The result is intended to be a critical ethnography in the sense that, rather than judge Balinese usage against the ‘objective’ yardsticks of particular academic traditions, I shall try critically to reflect on each discourse by contrast with the other.

Briefly my argument is as follows. The claims by proponents of a universal rationality, whom I shall label ‘universalists’, are mutually inconsistent enough to vitiate their claims to be self-evidently true, let alone offer a coherent set of criteria by which to evaluate other cultures.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For Indonesian readers, this is a reference to a famous poem by Tennyson about the Lady of Shalott, who was cursed to weave a magic web of the mythic Arthurian kingdom of Camelot, but who would die should she ever gaze out of the window at the reality. She did – and the mirror cracked, a result referred to at the end of the chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Clearly terms like ‘rationalism’ and ‘universalism’ are sufficiently broad, if not downright ambiguous, as to allow birds of many a theoretical feather under their wing. Consistently, I hope, with my concern about the dangers of essentializing, I use such terms as loose labels, preferably drawing upon authors’ self-description of their works. Where relevant I indicate whose argument is at issue. In the first instance, it is those analytical philosophers and fellow travellers who have taken part in the ‘rationality debate’. At times I have the suspicion, (doubtless unfounded!) that the British seem

Part of the inconsistency stems from the sheer range of uses of terms like ‘reason’; part from the degree to which such ambiguous notions disguise the play of metaphor and presupposition.

We easily assume our epistemological categories to be necessary, self-evident or even natural. For instance the link of logic and language with the world tends to be represented visually as one of reflection. Strict universalists are prone to argue that what is mirrored must be *essentially* the same everywhere and be perceived by identically organized minds. I shall question whether it is realistic to assume such universal essences or to regard human nature or ‘mind’ as if it were some kind of essentially definable object or process.

Given this shared view of the world, activities we can understand are therefore labelled ‘rational’ and those we cannot ‘symbolic’ (see Barley 1983: 10-11). Such categories, however, presuppose ideas about the consistency of utterances and their coherence with a notional ‘order’ in the world. For each category is assumed to be homogeneous and to hold good not only for the collective representations in any one society, but across cultures as well, despite the abundant evidence to the contrary. The issue is not whose presuppositions are right, but whether it is possible to represent what is going on accurately enough in any instance even to begin serious discussion. Appeal to reason, in preference to other ways of interpreting statements and actions, involves selection and power. If we stretch others on the rack of reason, we run the danger of reducing them to incoherent screams, and ultimately silence.

Rationality and reason are, anyway, peculiarly difficult notions to review critically because they have so many, and frequently incompatible, senses. They have played the role of key, or constitutive,

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more comfortable and convincing when arguing in an empirical vein than in handling neo-Cartesian, Kantian, or similar arguments for the necessity of a universal rationality, where their continental or American counter-parts seem more sophisticated (e.g. Lévi-Strauss or Chomsky). This is not to suggest, however, that the latter are without grave weaknesses (see Benoist 1978: 1-88; Ions 1977: 134-148; Goodman 1971; Putnam 1971).

Similar caveats about essentialism obviously apply to my use of terms like ‘culture’ and ‘the Balinese’. I do not wish to suggest there is any essential Balinese culture. There are only the myriad statements and actions which people living on the island of Bali, and calling themselves Balinese, engage in. Much of my information comes from the settlement in North Gianyar where I did research, but the results have been checked as broadly as possible. In referring to the Balinese I include high and low castes unless otherwise stated.

concepts in much Western discourse since the pre-Socratic philosophers (or better, our retrospective reading of their fragmentary texts). Worse still, reason and other equally ambiguous notions - like thought, truth, nature, law and reality - are usually mutually inter-defined. This makes the application of such ideas to other cultures difficult, and arguably impossible. If it be the hallmark of symbols to be polysemic, then the key concepts of proponents of universal rationality seem to be highly symbolic!

Appeal to the generality of reason has other serious shortcomings. Much of the argument seems to beg the question. The case for the necessity, or inevitability, of a common universal rationality, often relies on the use of just that rationality to argue the point. The position steers dangerously close to *petitio principii*. While philosophers are trained in ways of sidestepping such impasses, the innocent anthropologist may be reminded of another simple man's expostulation:

for these fellows of infinite tongue, that can rhyme themselves into ladies' favours, they do always reason themselves out again.  
Shakespeare *Henry V*, Act v, ii.

In the recent excited mating of philosophy and anthropology, it is easy to overlook a potential incompatibility. Philosophers are concerned to establish generalities and guidelines, such as how we ought properly to think, or must needs regard rationality, if we are to make the world coherent. Anthropologists, by contrast, are interested in what cultural representations are about and how people use them, not with how they ought to. The more reflective and fungus-infested ethnographers, grappling with the idiosyncrasies of someone else's culture, are often struck by quite how far our own assumptions permeate attempts to 'make sense' of others.

These remarks might seem obvious, but 'the entry of the philosophers' (in Gellner's phrase 1973), into the business of telling anthropologists what they should be doing and what their data mean, requires us to reflect on whether reason is, as is claimed, the panacea for all cultural confusions or whether it is merely latter-day epistemological colonization. It is remarkable that the model of scientific rationality should be thrust upon others at the time that its presuppositions are under devastating attack from many of its own luminaries (Quine 1953a; Kuhn 1970, 1977; Feyerabend 1975; Rorty 1980). One wonders if the two are unconnected? Be that as it may, anthropologists are being made

to dance a lobster quadrille to a rationalist tune, being cast off into the ethnographic sea only to be rejected when we swim back with disconcerting news.

The rationalist case may be presented as a paradox inherent in the 'relativism' imputed to its opponents. It is that:

the best evidence against relativism is, ultimately, the very activity of anthropologists, while the best evidence for relativism seems to be in the writings of anthropologists (Sperber 1982: 1982).

In fact, it is advocates of a universal rationality who put themselves in a self-referential bind. (Why Sperber's paradox need not apply to anthropologists will be reviewed later.) For rationalists of almost any hue must refuse 'to divorce reasons from objective truth' and insist that 'it has to be objectively true that one thing is good reason for another' (Hollis & Lukes 1982: 10, 11). If this be so, it is hard to see how rationalists can then disagree among themselves so sharply as to the good reasons for their own arguments (on which see Hollis & Lukes 1982: 12ff.). The criticisms are not *ad hominem*. If there are so many good reasons for asserting incompatible truths, by the rationalists' own criteria of valid argument, either there is a good deal of slippage between reason and truth, or reason alone cannot provide good reasons, or truth has many facets, or some such difficulty. Whichever is so, reason is not quite what it is claimed to be. Sperber's paradox may be turned back on him simply by substituting 'rationality' for 'relativism' and 'rationalists' for 'anthropologists'!

An equally thorny patch for rationalists is what they mean by 'reason' and 'rationality'. They are remarkably loth to define them; and when they do they usually disagree! This is not surprising as the great champions of reason from Descartes to Leibniz or Kant differed so deeply over what reason was and could do. As power theorists tend to fall back on force as the *deus ex machina*, so do rationalists in the last resort to logic. It is to pretty palaeolithic ideas of logic though, like the 'laws of thought' or a simple logic of propositions, to which they turn. The hesitancy in pinning their epistemological flags to the mast even here may be because the going gets treacherous long before reaching the murky waters of a logic of classes, predicate calculus or non-standard logics aimed at coping with some of the more massive leaks in the ship of reason.

Logic is not then so simple, nor safe. The complexities of the truth-conditions even of elementary ‘if...then’ constructions, which worry semanticists (Kempson 1975; Wilson 1975; Lyons 1977:138-229), have exercised some of the finest philosophical minds (e.g. Russell 1905; Strawson 1950, 1964). If logic is so troublesome why assume it to underwrite the universal efficacy of reason? For such

deductive logic is but a poor thing, being merely a tool for achieving consistency. Rationality *requires more than* consistency’ (Newton-Smith 1982: 110, my emphasis).

At best it seems we need more than logic. What this surplus is varies between philosophers. So does whether the resulting rational brew is an *a priori* condition of intelligibility (Hollis 1982), or an *a posteriori* test of practical, let alone interpretive, success (Newton-Smith 1982; Horton 1979, 1982; Taylor 1982)?<sup>4</sup> The further one inquires the more the universalist plight mirrors that of the monocular Tseu in a three dimensional world.

### **Images of knowledge**

Rationality is then more than just consistency. For not only is ‘our concept of rationality *richer*’, but it permits ‘a *higher* – or in some sense superior – *view* of reality’ (Taylor 1982: 88,89, my emphases). Is it not curious that a rationalist requires recourse to metaphor to explain an idea deeply inimical to the whole notion of metaphor? For rationalists traditionally eschew the figurative. The truth against which reason measures itself is the world and mirrored in language. Tropes have no place in formal logic or empirical truth (see Quine 1979: 159-60); and a deep distrust of rhetoric can be traced as far back as the great Greek systematizers.

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<sup>4</sup> It is often unclear whether the claim is that we must assume a common rationality for the purposes of translation, or whether it is some ontological commitment to rationality as a human universal. The going gets rough when one asks of what ‘rational’ is predicated. Is it of collective representations, of persons, of thought, of action, or of criteria of verification? If it be thought, are we speaking of propositions, utterances, semiotic regularities or semantic rules? If it be action, what relation do these have to the actor (for instance, are they causes of action). A problem here is settling what is rationality and what a rationale. The closer the argument gets to postulating rationality as *a priori*, the more it is open to criticisms of the kind levelled against Chomsky for suggesting so much can be bracketed away in a theory of ‘innate abilities’.

This putative ancestry throws light on the claims, and blind spots, of much rationalism. For, it is argued, logic was devised to counter the persuasive oratory used in public debate in Greek city states (e.g. Lloyd 1979: 59-125; Todorov 1982: 60-83). It sets out to be more persuasive still than rhetoric, by grounding its appeal in ‘necessity’ or ‘reality’. It is conveniently forgotten that both rhetoric and logic involve, as we shall see, relations of power.

A more amusing way in which rationalists use figurative language is in depicting their opponents. Critics of the supremacy of reason are labelled ‘soft’ relativists. These unfortunate woolly-minded romantics are unable to ‘rise above’ their feelings and prejudices; whereas rationalists are hard-headed, with a higher, clear view of things. The image of intellectual he-men, grappling spaghetti-western fashion with a tough reality, comes out in their imagery of building ‘bridgeheads’ (Hollis 1970:215ff.) and surviving in a harsh world of ‘material-objects’ (Horton 1979). Meanwhile your poor relativist is condemned, like the poet Bunthorne, to ‘...walk down Piccadilly with a poppy or a lily, in your mediaeval hand’ (Gilbert & Sullivan *Patience*, Act 1). The more or less loony relativism which universalists ascribe to everyone else presupposes a dichotomy focused upon reason, which skews the potential coherence of everything else. This nicely makes the point that taxonomies of rationality are not neutral, but involve power. Unfortunately the (*autre-disant*) relativists often go along with this ascription and merely read ‘hard’ as ‘rigid’, and ‘soft’ as ‘flexible’. My worry about universalism, however, is exactly the opposite. It is not ‘hard’ enough: it allows in too many questionable assumptions about the nature of the world, human beings, language, knowledge and order. Deny it as they do, rationalists live in a very ‘soft’ world, comfortably furnished with the latest concepts and meanings (woolly ‘mental’ suppositions and ‘obscure intermediary entities’ Quine 1953a: 22) which, to a sceptical eye, look just as quaint and ethnocentric as do the Tsew.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> As Hacking has pointed out, the rationalist model tends to assume a complex relationship between four postulated entities. These are a knowing subject (or mind), speech (or ideas), an external reality (note the spatial metaphor) and experience (unmediated by culture and conveniently universal) of that reality available to the knowing subject (1975: 157-87). Each of these entities and the relation between them have come to raise increasingly serious problems. For instance the primacy of the knowing subject is under challenge (conservatively by Strawson 1959, more radically by Althusser 1972 and Foucault 1972a, 1986a, 1986b). The relation between language,

Apart from striking spatial and tactile images, rationalist argument is often shot through with a visual metaphor of language and logic as a "mirror of nature."<sup>6</sup>

It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions. The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations - some accurate, some not - and capable of being studied by pure, non-empirical methods. Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself. Without this latter notion, the strategy common to Descartes and Kant - getting more accurate representations by inspecting, repairing and polishing the mirror, so to speak - would not have made sense (Rorty, R. 1980: 12).

To the extent that anthropologists are concerned less with how the world ultimately is than with the forms collective representations take empirically, such presuppositions become a matter for study in ourselves and in others. If rationalism is 'the story of the domination of the mind of the West by ocular metaphors, within a social perspective' (Rorty, R. 1980: 13), one might ask what models, if any, are found in other cultures?

Visual metaphors of knowledge seem so obvious as to rule out would-be contenders. Other mammals, however, make more use of sound, smell and touch, than we. How, for example, might the world appear were senses other than sight primary? For olfactory beings (some breeds of dog come to mind) presence would presumably not be a sharp there-or-not matter, but a fairly sudden proximity and a gradual weakening of stimuli (see Jonas and Jonas 1976, for some amusing

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experience and reality, let alone the status of each, has been shown to be very problematic (e.g. Wittgenstein 1958; Quine 1960; Kuhn 1970; Goodman 1978). It seems unwise in the light of these difficulties to try to apply the model to other cultures without careful reflection on what it presupposes.

<sup>6</sup> The image which pervades this model of knowledge is the mind as an internal eye. Knowledge was a showing 'to the eye, the only eye, the inward eye. That which was shown was the principle: namely the origin, the source. The source was the *essence*, that which made the object what it is' (Hacking 1975: 162, my emphasis).

What finally upset this view was the recognition that 'knowledge is public, and is not merely a mode of existence of 'human nature', 'understanding', or 'reason' (1975: 166). The links between knowing as seeing, reason, human nature and essence will be discussed in due course.

possibilities). It would be an analog world of subtle degrees, not of clear digital distinctions (see Wilden 1972: 155-201). Logic, of course, is the stereotype of unambiguous division; and attempts to adapt it to the world of uncertainty and shades of meaning in which we live are still in their infancy.

Such reflection is not just barren speculation on the doings of brutes. For Balinese popular ideas about the grounds of knowledge are different from ours, and quite subtle. The visual metaphor of knowledge is pretty explicit. Terms for knowing are mostly linked to sight.<sup>7</sup> Balinese also recognize a hierarchy of senses. Sight is widely held to be the most reliable guide to the material world, but it cannot deal with the past, the future and what is not visible. Hearing occupies an ambiguous role. Balinese often stress language's capacity to shape and transmit information, but it is recognized that language is polysemic, and double-edged to boot; for it is moulded by the purposes, perceptions and interests of speakers and listeners. So speech may be used to lie as easily as to say what someone thinks to be the case. As Goethe once remarked: 'If I make a mistake, anyone can see it, but not if I lie.'

Balinese epistemology seems not simply to be a folk model. For it is closely parallel to, and historically may well derive from, Indian Nyaya philosophy which recognizes four ways (*pramana*) of obtaining valid knowledge.<sup>8</sup> This is not to imply that the issue can be ignored if a culture does not have a literate philosophical tradition, as the work of Overing (1985) and Salmond (1985) make abundantly clear. Before trying to bury the corpse of possible alternative rationalities, we might inquire what others do, not just what we think they ought to do.

### **Ideas of truth**

Ideas of truth, like Byzantine contracts, admit of many readings. The view implicit in most universalist arguments is a version of a classical

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<sup>7</sup> *Nawang*, and *uning*, the words I gloss as 'knowing' in low and high Balinese respectively, are linked to the root *tawang*, and near homonym, *ening*. Both signify 'clear', 'transparent'. Another important term, *meturah-turahan*, 'guessing', is literally working out what something is in very poor light.

<sup>8</sup> The common Balinese version is discussed below and varies in several interesting features. Only one form of knowledge rests mainly on observation, while two make much use of language. This leaves the Balinese in something of a quandary over their reliability, as we shall see.

account, again traced traditionally to Aristotle, which runs crudely as follows. Language ‘contains’ meaning in the form of propositions, by referring to reality through some form of correspondence. As a theory of signs, the connection is by virtue of imitation (resemblance), natural association (causation, or motivation) or convention (a cake which may be cut many ways, see Todorov 1982: 15-99). This ‘Correspondence Theory’ of truth and meaning also offers a common-sense account of translation. For the equivalence of sentences in different languages is guaranteed in so far as the propositions they embody describe a single reality.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most thorough-going attempts to restate and defend this traditional (intellectualist) position is by Sperber (1975, 1982). In his view, proper knowledge of the world is represented linguistically in propositions, all other uses of language being tidied away into a class of ‘semi-propositional representations’ (1982: 169), which are referentially defective, and therefore ambiguous and suspect. At best speakers may express their attitude to what is said and listeners choose the most relevant, or appealing, interpretation. Such spastic propositions include not only poetry and ‘symbolic’ utterances but also, miraculous to relate, most culturally transmitted statements of belief and even the arguments of what he chooses to class as his ‘relativist’ opponents!

What assumptions does such a view of truth make? First, the link of language and truth is expressed in at least two incompatible metaphors. Language is seen here as ‘containing’ meaning, or truth: a ‘conduit metaphor’, which simplifies and distorts the ways language actually works (Reddy 1979). Somehow language also ‘represents’ reality, which assumes a ‘mimetic’ or ‘copy’ metaphor (Goodman 1968). So true knowledge often lands up being represented visually (for instance in terms of spatial metaphors, as a ‘theoretical landscape’, Salmond 1982). Second, introducing reality as the means of equating propositions in different languages merely creates yet another step in translation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <sup>9</sup> In the Romantic reaction to this Classical view arguably all that changes is that language is recognized not as imitating the external world, but as denoting the ‘inner’ experience of a speaker’s or artist’s act of production, or of the working of language itself (Todorov 1982: 147-221). Jakobson, in fact, identified six different functions of language, only one of which was its capacity to refer to the state of the world (1960). The other potential functions of language tend conveniently to be forgotten in most universalist accounts.

<sup>10</sup> Gellner offers a succinct critique of this approach (1970: 24-25). Tarski (1956), whose theory of ‘truth-conditional semantics’ provides the most elegant version of

In its extreme form ‘Correspondence Theory’ works by simply shrugging off most kinds of statement which puzzle and interest anthropologists and non-verbal communication (see Goodman 1968, 1978) as emotional ‘attitudes’ (cf. Rorty, A. 1980). Even if a more eclectic view is taken, such theories are part of a particular historical tradition and ignore the question of how other cultures represent the world, or indeed how they hold language or knowledge to work. Correspondence Theory is like a dog with one leg - in bad need of support from a contextual, performative or pragmatic theory of truth and meaning as a prosthesis.

Balinese ideas about truth embody subtly different presuppositions. Yet their views show great consistency and sensitivity to the grounds, and limits, of empirical knowledge, without straining metaphor. They are fashionably up to date in denying anyone, except conceivably Divinity, a privileged access to reality and have a theory of human nature which is not essentially, founded on rationality (unlike Aristotle’s definition of Man as a ‘rational biped’)

Let us start with terminology. Several words may be provisionally glossed as ‘true’ in one sense or other. For instance, *patut* (*beneh* in low Balinese, cognate with Malay *benar*) implies being coherent, fitting, or appropriate in a given context. The closest term to our notion of empirically true seems to be *wiakti* (in high Balinese, *saja* in low), ‘manifest’, or *sayuwakti*, evident.<sup>11</sup> What is at stake becomes clearer in the light of the critical distinction between *sakala*, visible, embodied, and *niskala*, invisible, non-manifest. For what is *sakala* may be known far more fully to human beings than what is *niskala*.<sup>12</sup>

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‘Correspondence Theory’, argued cogently that it would not work for natural languages anyway. Not only does this approach applied to naming and reference lead into a Minoan maze (Lyons 1977: 174-229; but see also a would-be Theseus, Kripke 1977), but it is far from clear what a proposition is anyway, let alone whether it is reasonable (*sic*) to assume such ‘abstract entities’ exist (Quine 1970: 2).

<sup>11</sup> The words are found in Old Javanese, the language of Balinese texts and priestly knowledge, as *wyakti*, evidence, clarification, and *sawyakti*, clear, universally known (Zoetmulder 1982: 2347), the last making the point that such knowledge is public. In Sanskrit *vyakti* refers to manifestation, visible appearance, (Gonda 1952: 176).

<sup>12</sup> cf. Sanskrit *sakala*, consisting of parts, complete; also Old Javanese, in visible or material form, pertaining to the world perceptible by the senses (Zoetmulder 1982: 1603). Also Sanskrit *niskala*, without parts, undivided (cf. Gonda 1952: 363); in Old Javanese, immaterial, invisible. I do not intend to go here into the issue of the ontological status of the two terms, as they raise complex questions about Balinese

The differences between what I take as the Balinese and universalist presuppositions are delicate but crucial. They pose the Balinese problems too. For the distinction between manifest and non-manifest is equivalent neither to the dichotomy between present and absent, nor true and false. The states are not dichotomous, but overlapping. The non-manifest may be invisible; it may be visible but not present; it may be present as an aspect of, or hidden within, what is visible. There is an ontological and epistemological gulf between *sakala* and *niskala*, from the point of view of humans (who straddle the gap in life, between being visible and engaging in behaviour; and thinking and feeling, activities which are non-manifest in others). As we shall see, Balinese are cautious about making statements that confuse their two categories, a sensibility which, to my mind, keeps them out of a lot of trouble.

*Sakala* admits of at least two readings. Narrowly, it is what is visible; broadly, what the senses can perceive. The difference adds to the complexity of Balinese judgements. Knowing about the non-manifest, in its various senses, is as important as it is fraught with uncertainty.<sup>13</sup> The care Balinese villagers show in distinguishing the two realms curtails the dubious use of metaphor to represent the unknown through the known. For example, as time is *niskala*, it cannot be described catachretically by analogy with space, which is *sakala*.<sup>14</sup> The failure to inquire into Balinese epistemological categories means that the debate about the nature of time in Bali, which is claimed really to be cyclical, linear, durational or punctuational, is largely irrelevant (see Geertz 1973f; Bloch 1977; Bourdillon 1978; Howe 1981).

The part played by the various senses in establishing truth is interesting. To know empirically that something is so, *wiakti*, normally requires visual confirmation. As most cultural knowledge is obviously

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ideas about substance or matter, and the existence of particulars and universals (on why this is important, see Rorty, R. 1980: 33-45).

<sup>13</sup> The disjuncture between the manifest and non-manifest suggests a more consistent explanation than most for the Balinese interest in trance, revelation (*wahyu*, cf. Sanskrit *bahya*, (being) outwardly visible) and the existence of an extensive vocabulary for kinds of manifestation on the one hand; and for the practical problems of inferring intentions and feelings in legal and inter-personal contexts on the other.

<sup>14</sup> Catachresis is the rhetorical term for representing something abstract in terms of something tangible. It needs handling with care, because it is very easy to start talking about the abstraction as if it were manifest. We do so when we talk of society as an organism or language, or culture as a text. This is different from saying it is useful for purposes of analysis to imagine society *as* like a language in certain respects.

acquired from others through speech, its accuracy is open to question and so needs careful qualification. Therefore Balinese are wont, with commendable restraint, to prefix unverified statements with qualifiers like *wènten orti*, ‘it is said’ (literally: there is news), *kalumbrah*, ‘it is widely held’. Otherwise where their experience is inadequate to generalize or say for sure they may introduce modal terms such as *minab* or *mirib* (probably, possibly; expressible, perhaps for my benefit, as percentages!). To dismiss such compound statements, as does Sperber, as ‘semi-propositional’, is to fail to grasp that Balinese in daily life are often more punctilious than we, not less.

While Balinese stress sight as a means of knowing, it does not follow that they draw a dichotomy between phenomena and noumena, nor between appearance and essence. The non-manifest, in whatever sense, is not the essential. Nor is the Balinese Chain of Being simply correlated with the ability to grasp the non-manifest. Dogs, for example, whose place is far humbler than their English fellows, can see, hear and smell what humans cannot including invisible spirits and gods. So their knowledge of the non-manifest is, in many ways, greater.<sup>15</sup> *Sakala* so circumscribes what people can know for sure that any individual’s knowledge is inevitably partial (a sensitivity to differences in aptitudes, interests and emotions, let alone the context of utterances, further the Balinese disinclination to take statements at face value). Balinese ideas of what is manifestly so or not cannot comfortably be grafted onto our model of propositions being true or false. Scepticism over human abilities sets Balinese sharply apart from Hellenic, and later, traditions of the omnipotence of reason. Be that as it may, they display a healthy pragmatism, which deserves study not *a priori* dismissal.

So far I have described the most certain means of knowing – about what is manifest. The remainder deals with the non-manifest. At this stage it is useful to consider the parallels and differences between the Balinese and the traditional Nyaya doctrine of the four ways of knowing. These are summarized in the Table below which gives, besides the Nyaya terms, the Balinese equivalents, which derive from Sanskrit and

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<sup>15</sup> It is humans, if anything, who are defective – a view endorsed in a rather charming myth which runs as follows. Originally humans could see gods and spirits as can animals still. One day, however, a human was defecating at the side of the road and called out a greeting to a passing god. The gods felt that such behaviour was intolerably polluting, so they put whites round the human’s eyes in order that humans could never insult them again in such a manner. This is why people now have whites in their eyes and animals not.

Old Javanese. One might note that ideas about direct perception have much in common. Whereas the priestly sources I know (which is only a small sample from a vast, and largely unexplored, textual tradition) stress *anumana*, inference from observation, popular thinking tends to run this together with *upama*, the use of example in comparison (*upamana* in Nyaya). Most villagers regard both as providing some clue to what has not been witnessed directly. The former, which rely on past observed connections (what we might term ‘inductive reasoning’), are held to be more precise than the latter, which depend on comparing (*nyaihang*) entities which are by definition not the same.

**Table 1** *Indian and Balinese forms of knowledge*

<i>Nyaya term</i>	<i>means of knowing</i>	<i>Balinese Term*</i>	<i>means of knowing</i>	<i>popular ideas</i>
<i>Pratyaksa</i>	perception	<i>Pratyaksa</i>	direct observation or perception	same
<i>Anumana</i>	inference	<i>Anumana (Anumata)</i>	inference from observations	both inference from evidence and comparison treated as examples ( <i>upama</i> ) of various kinds
<i>Upamana</i>	comparison	<i>(Upama)</i>		
<i>Sabda</i>	verbal knowledge	<i>Agama</i>	teaching of religious people	Any verbal ( <i>sabda</i> ) or written ( <i>tutur/tattwa</i> ) source, especially historical or religious texts

\* Terms found in Brahmanical texts or in general use among ordinary village Balinese.

### **The question of logic**

The Balinese use of a kind of inferential reasoning (*anumana*) is critical to an understanding of how they construct and interpret arguments, including those recalcitrant assertions we tend to label 'symbolic'. I shall concentrate on inference here. This is not to suggest other forms of knowledge are marginal. On the contrary, inference is only one of many ways of interpreting texts, theatre and ritual. So I shall suggest later the potential importance of the others.

Knowledge acquired from others puts most Balinese in something of a dilemma. On the one hand, it is how one learns culturally transmitted knowledge and much else besides; on the other, its accuracy cannot be checked. Texts may also contradict one another, or offer incompatible accounts. Here the tendency is to adopt the version most fitting to the circumstances. In other words, consistency, or coherence, is treated as at least as important as any correspondence to unverifiable past events.

The possibility that something like the Nyaya mode of reasoning, or 'syllogistic', might be used in Bali is interesting enough to look at more carefully. To understand what is involved, it is useful to return to the contrast between Balinese and Greek (or later) ideas of logic. For the rationality debate, at least as far back as Lévy-Bruhl (1926), rests on the purported failure of people in other cultures to observe 'the laws of thought'.

What are these laws then? They are 'the law of identity' (A is A; every subject is its own predicate); 'the law of non-contradiction' (A is not not-A; contradictory judgements cannot both be true); and 'the law of excluded middle' (everything is either A or not-A; no middle judgement can be true, while the falsity of one follows from the truth of the other).

The question is though: quite what status do these laws have? Unfortunately they have been interpreted in different ways by their own proponents, being taken as, roughly, either descriptive, prescriptive or formal. Aristotle is often viewed as regarding the laws as primarily descriptive of 'being as such', rather than as describing the activity of thinking. Prescriptively they have been understood however as stating either absolute or conventional standards of reasoning (Keynes 1884 and Ayer 1936 respectively). Again they have been treated as formal propositions which are true in virtue of their form and independently of any content whatsoever (Leibniz and, in a different way, Kant). The problem for rationalists is which of the readings to take. If they are

prescriptive or formal laws, how do they have immediate bearing on the issue of ethnographic variation? If they are descriptive, who is to say before empirical investigation what form they might take? Rationalism shows its colours here in fusing two senses of law. And, one might ask ‘*sed quis custodiet ipsos Custodes?*’<sup>16</sup>

More is at stake here than is often realized. On one reading Aristotle’s law of non-contradiction is a defence of the metaphysical principle of identity in face of Heraclitus who is reputed to have maintained it to be possible for the same thing to be and not be, because things were ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’. The law of identity also raises questions about the status of the copula (cf. Derrida 1979). Does it express equality or identity? Or is it a relation of subject and predicate? If the latter, what does it imply about the subject’s existence? Obviously one interpretation of the laws of thought would make nonsense, as the Tsew so avidly did, of other interpretations. Despite the fervent wishes of its supporters, at some point logic involves metaphysical presuppositions (as Hollis has lately conceded 1982: 84). Which of these interpretations should be the yardstick of rationality is partly responsible for the confusion that engulfs the topic.

Even if we overlook these serious drawbacks, how suitable are the laws of thought for evaluating culture? For a start such laws by design apply best to, and have been derived from, not say art or ritual, but language - usually *in vitreo*. On sceptical grounds, rather than assume a transcendent realm of propositions, it is wise to look at how the laws of thought apply to what people say, or presuppose in speaking and acting. For instance, unless speech is very elaborated, speakers tend to assume a measure of common knowledge with their audiences, the nature of which needs study. This raises questions both about the possible contexts and the standards to which speakers conform (see Grice 1975, 1978, on a pragmatic theory of ‘conversational implicature’). For rationalists, the catch is that contexts and standards are a pragmatic, and so ethnographic, issue. If so they cannot be circumscribed easily, or *a priori*, by a semantic logic. This is a nasty problem for ‘practical reason’ which is an empty notion if there are no circumstances for reason to be practical in! Oscar Wilde may have been right when he remarked

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<sup>16</sup> This is a famous Latin saying. ‘But who judges the judges themselves?’

I can stand brute force, but brute reason is quite unbearable. There is something unfair about its use. It is hitting below the intellect.

It is hardly surprising therefore that an attempt has been made to claw back context and standards of co-operation into a formal model, amenable to the laws of thought (Sperber and Wilson 1982). The aim is to show that such standards are a necessary condition of communication (I suspect this may beg the question) and that *relevant* context is logically implied by the utterances themselves. Besides such technical questions as whether a logic of implication or entailment is better suited to this task (Kempson 1977: 139-56), relevance has proven hard to pin down. The simplest utterances presuppose far more than is allowed and imply a range of quite different possible circumstances (Moore 1982). The whole exercise is academic anyway, because it assumes a prescriptive view of logic, the universality of which has yet to be demonstrated. Now, if the standards accepted in the culture in question differ, it is not much use telling people that they are wrong because they failed to adopt Sperber and Wilson's criteria!

### **Balinese uses of inference**

It is one thing to argue that yardsticks, hallowed by years of scholarly port drinking, like the laws of thought may be inadequate to explain how people in other cultures reason. It is another to put something in their place. One starting point is the styles of reasoning that people in a culture use and recognize as legitimate. For if statements are made and judged according to invoked canons of reasoning, and presupposition, such canons are empirically part of the ethnography.

So let us turn to the Balinese. If, as we saw, logic involves metaphysical presuppositions, how do they affect Balinese styles of reasoning? The postulate of a non-manifest implies that, however probable an argument, the non-manifest is never subject to empirical verification. *Niskala* enters Balinese representations in another way.<sup>17</sup> In popular Balinese thinking there are three elements: water, fire and air,

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<sup>17</sup> Each constituent may be perceptible, invisible or, at least, transparent. So any sensible combination of elements also embodies *niskala*. Old Javanese texts refer to there being five perceptible elements (from the Sanskrit *pancamahabhuta*; cf. *pancatanmatra*, the five immaterial elements from which the former are produced). The Balinese reduce these to three by treating the remaining two, ether and earth, as spatial domains.

from which all visible form is composed. Each element moves (typically, water downwards, fire upwards, air laterally or freely) or indeed may change nature. The corollary of this mutability is that composite forms are also continuously transforming (*matemahan*). Villagers were delighted when I protested this did not fit hard objects like steel axes or mountains. They remarked that the hardest metal wears with time, mountains erode and, in Bali, are even volcanic!

The implication for the law of identity is that the Balinese view of the world as transforming, becoming something else, is remarkably close to Heraclitus' supposed position. Further, as the non-manifest is empirically unverifiable, this requires the law of excluded middle to be modified in practice, because a third possibility might always hold. Lastly, the law of non-contradiction is deliberately breached in order to express kinds of uncertainty (see Wolfram 1985), or the play of political power. Even if one allows the laws of thought as the formal preconditions of intelligibility, they still need applying to the world to which utterances refer.

I mentioned Balinese recognize a form of inferential reasoning closely resembling Nyaya syllogistic, which has five stages:

- |   |                    |                              |
|---|--------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. This mountain is fire-possessing.  | - <i>pratijna</i>  | (hypothesis)                 |
| 2. Because it is smoke-possessing.  | - <i>hetu</i>      | (reason)                     |
| 3. Whatever is smoke- possessing is fire-possessing, like kitchen, unlike lake. | - <i>udaharana</i> | (example/ general principle) |
| 4. This mountain, since it possesses smoke, possesses fire.                     | - <i>upanaya</i>   | (application)                |
| 5. This mountain is fire-possessing.  | - <i>nigamana</i>  | (conclusion)                 |
- (from Potter 1977: 180-81)

Balinese may actually use this example, when speaking of volcanoes (where reasoning is supplemented by periodic, and often catastrophic, observation).

Balinese inference differs from Nyaya in stressing the first three stages and in allowing flexibility in the order of citing the reason and the example. If someone fails to understand the first three however, something like stages four and five may be added, as an afterthought. A conversation in a coffee-stall should illustrate Balinese usage.

- |  |                    |                 |
|--|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Farmers in Sukawati (a village in the | - <i>nerangang</i> | (describing the |
|--|--------------------|-----------------|

South) use ploughs on their ricefields,	<i>kawèntenan</i>	situation)
2. Because the earth is very hard to work.	- <i>karana</i>	(the cause?)
3. It is like the rice-fields of Jero Mangku Dalem (naming the owner of the hardest fields in the area).	- <i>praimba</i>	(the example, but not visible to the listener)

Or a father giving a *salak*, a fruit with a skin like a snake's, to a small boy spoke as follows:

1. One can eat <i>salaks</i> .	- <i>keterangan</i>	(description)
2. They are like oranges.	- <i>nyaihang</i>	(comparing)
(3. Because they contain <i>merta</i> (roughly: nourishment) not <i>wisiya</i> (poison).)	- <i>mawinan</i>	(the reason?)

In the latter case, the example was given immediately and the reason only added when the child seemed uncertain. Unless one is speaking to the young or with formal authority, it is considered arrogant to hold forth, and one waits for suitable interjections from listeners, or for them to draw false conclusions, before suggesting one's own. The preference for dialogue (*saling masaut; magatik; timbal*) makes much use of the audience's knowledge. So it stresses the pragmatic aspects of this kind of inference.

Speaking of Balinese reasoning as syllogistic may, in fact, be misleading. It has little in common with the Aristotelian syllogism with its stress on consistency between propositions and analytical as against synthetic knowledge. As Charles Lamb summed it up, such 'logic is nothing more than a knowledge of words'. By contrast, Balinese are closer to the kind of inductive reasoning, or 'inference' proposed by John Stuart Mill. As Potter argued, exponents of Nyaya

view inference as consisting of judgements whose referents are existing things, not, as we in the West are prone to do, as relating to words or concepts' (1977: 182).

Rather than spend time arguing whether, or in what sense, Balinese have formal logic, it might be more profitable to consider how they make use of what they have.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Again I have no space to discuss Balinese uses of propositional logic of the 'if...then' kind, although as Example 5 suggests, this exists. One reason behind this omission is that there are awkward problems in trying simply to translate Balinese *yèn* or *yèning* (low and high Balinese respectively) as 'if'. Apart from it not always being

Several features are worth note. The first stage of argument rests firmly on observation, but commonly has a contextual limit (not all mountains are volcanic, not all farmers use ploughs). This is quite different from the universalistic tendencies of syllogisms of the form: ‘All x are y’. In the second stage, why something should be so (the *explanans*) is spoken of as either *karana* or *mawinan*. Whether these can translated as ‘cause’ and ‘reason’ is a moot point in a culture, the metaphysics of which does not draw a contrast between the physical, and mental, in a Cartesian fashion.

We can also see the singular status of the non-manifest and how inference and comparison are conflated. When the example cited is visible (or otherwise perceptible) at the time to the listener, it is described as a *conto* (Old Javanese, sample). When it is not, it is referred to as a *pra(tiw)imba* (Sanskrit, image, model, shadow), a term as widely used as it is hard to pin down. It is used of absent examples as well as analogies; but it always seems to carry the implication of being an imperfect instance, because something has to be taken on trust, or because the connection is indirect or spurious but useful. Balinese reasoning can as easily be used to compare unlike things (*salak* and oranges) as to draw strict inferences. For instance one old man recalled how he had explained what a plough looked like to his grandchild (ploughs were rarely used in the research village) with the *praimba* of the weapon carried by Sang Baladéwa, a character in the shadow play version of the Mahabharata. Care in specifying the sense of example or comparison is a means of stating precisely the nature of the connection between subject and illustration, and so indicates how reliable the argument is as a whole. Would that most writers on rationality were so fastidious.

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clear when the ‘then’ clause follows, it is not uncommon to produce a statement with two parts *both* prefixed by *yèn*, (not as in Example 5, where one can reasonably infer the consequent). So the effect in crude translation reads like a sentence with “if...if”. The use of *yèn* is made more problematic by it being used of present and future action, whereas what is past is spoken of widely using *wiadin*, which is normally translated as ‘although’ and used in a manner identical to *yèn*. The term therefore appears to be closer to a signal that what follows is provisional or conditional in a broad sense, which would differ from the antecedent-consequent relationship implied in ‘if...then’. The problem requires a closer analysis of tapes of Balinese language use than I have been able to complete to date.

## Apparently illogical statements

To what extent does Balinese reasoning offer a way of understanding seemingly flagrant breaches of the laws of thought? Below I give examples of how Balinese use inference to interpret cultural statements. For they find many collective representations as puzzling as do we. The point is not to show how rational, or otherwise, the Balinese are in someone else's terms. It is rather to illustrate how villagers set about coping with such representations when they need to explicate them, not just leave them as matters for priests (whose knowledge, as opposed to authority, often adds little to the interpretation).

Many odd statements come about through cack-handed translation. An example is:

1. *Carik-carik urip.* = Ricefields are alive.

The problem is not so much circumscribing 'ricefields' as misrendering the contrast set *urip* : *padem*. What is predicated of *urip* is a subject with a capacity for action (*laksana*; see Zoetmulder 1982: 958), or for organized movement or resistance (e.g. large trees). *Padem* is used of things which normally lack such capacities (like stone, metal and non-volcanic mountains). Now anyone who has sat watching a ricefield knows it is a highly mobile micro-environment. The statement sounds odd largely because of a lack of correspondence between the range of terms in different languages.

The difficulties begin, however, when *urip* is predicated of objects as various as buildings, cars or metallophone orchestras, after rites have been performed over them. On one interpretation buildings, for instance, are 'animated' by the use of 'life-substances' (*pangurip*, Howe 1983: 154-5). This translation, however, arguably ignores Balinese ideas about the nature of being, as *urip* may be predicated of any system of energy (*bayu*; cf. Old Javanese, and Sanskrit, *vayu*). For cars move, metallophones turn movement into sound, buildings react in resisting wind and earthquakes. Without claiming this solves all the problems, study of presuppositions is a sensible preamble to translation.

Statements of belief need handling with care. We need to know something of Balinese metaphysics and their views on well-formed

utterances. For instance, in various contexts it is quite possible to hear the following statement:

2. *Pantun kahyangin antuk Batari Sri.*

Which it is tempting to translate as:

The Goddess Sri is incarnated (present mystically) in rice.

*Kahyangin* is one of several terms Balinese use to express the problematic relationship of the non-manifest to the manifest. It would be easy to dismiss this as a classic example of pre-logical thought; but this hardly does justice to the complexity and subtlety of the relation of *sakala* and *niskala*.<sup>19</sup>

The Balinese are careful in speaking about deities and tend to avoid, especially if they are speaking formally, expressions like:

	<i>mamanah</i>		think
2a. <i>Tiang</i>	<i>wènten Batara.</i>	= I	God(s) exist(s).
	<i>pracaya</i>		believe (1)

but allow

2b. *Tiang ngega wènten Batara* = I believe (2) God(s) exist(s).

Instead they tend to use some expression like:

	<i>manah(an)</i>		thought.
2c. <i>Ring</i>	<i>tiangé, wènten Batara.</i>	= In my	God(s)
exist(s)			
	<i>kapracayaan</i>		belief

The issue of belief is too complicated to exhaust here, but when I asked about the statements above, I often received replies along the

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<sup>19</sup> Two of the most commonly found expressions are *kahyangin*, from *hyang*, god, spirit, plus the passive verb form, and *kadulurin*, the active form of which *nulurin* implies 'to participate in', as in work activities or a festivity - an amusing parallel with Lévy-Bruhl's notion of 'mystic participation'. In passing my analysis of language usage suggests that priests and villagers when speaking carefully are more likely to use what is usually called the passive voice, indicated by *ka...in*, than the active in these situations. This raises interesting questions of whether Western grammatical categories are really appropriate here, or whether something else is being implied.

following lines. The first expression is *solèh*, something akin to a category mistake. For Gods are *niskala*, but believing or thinking is an act, or state, of which the subject (but not others) is aware, and so is *sakala*. The sentence therefore confuses categories. The third expression avoids the problem because thought and belief are abstract, *niskala*. This also makes the sentence provisional, as *niskala* cannot be verified and so does not require the evidence with which assertions about *sakala* should be backed.

Thought and belief are also held to be mediated by desire. This suggests one explanation for there being two words for our ‘belief’. The first, *pracaya* is a difficult word (Sanskrit, *pratyaya*, and Old Javanese, *pracaya*, to trust, to be sure, convinced). For Balinese it has the connotation of not knowing, but wishing, or expressing trust. The second, *ngega* is to know something to be the case and also to desire it, or express commitment to it. Statements using *ngega* are most commonly made by priests on the basis of tangible evidence of the presence of Gods (a sudden chill on a hot day; a wind no one else notices). So *ngega* is properly used as a verb because the belief and Gods are both *sakala* in this case. *Manah* is more recondite still. It comes from Sanskrit *manas*, mental powers, and is treated in Nyaya doctrine as a sixth organ of sense and, in the Buddhist Abhidharma as

the subjective disposition that receives the sense stimuli and comprises them, giving them the peculiar subjective admixture that is never absent in either perception or cognition (Guenther 1976: 16-17).

Balinese, whose heritage is Hindu-Buddhist, may use *manah* in either sense. Crude ascription of ‘irrational beliefs’ to the Balinese not only misses the subtleties of use, but also relies on the crassest correspondence approach to translation.

More complex examples bring out villagers’ use of inference and also possible readings of the law of identity to boot. When faced with collective representations which defy observable proof, Balinese may argue as I heard them do over the following statement:

3. *Batara-Batari meraga angin* = Gods take the form of wind.  
have the body of

Following the stages of argument discussed above, this is read as:

1. Gods are like air, which is unbounded and invisible.
2. This is because gods are *niskala*, but are apparently capable of action or bringing about effects.
3. Wind is unbounded and invisible, but is capable of action or bringing about effects.

The argument is by analogy and so is inexact (gods are not wind), but the comparison is held to be fitting in other respects.

A more difficult example is one which derives from ritual invocations (*mantra*) and the symbolic classification of compass points with deities, colours, elements and so forth. At first sight this mixes categories of the manifest (e.g. elements) and non-manifest (gods). The point, however, is that *descriptions* of gods are manifest and based on imagery or analogy (as in paintings depicting deities). For instance, the Hindu God Wisnu (Wisnu in Bali) is associated with North, black or dark blue, water and other features. It is tempting to render the connections as predicative. Even in the simple utterances of villagers the grounds for so doing are far from clear, as in

	<i>selem.</i>		black.
4. <i>Ida Batara Wisnu Ida</i>		= Lord Wisnu -	
	<i>toya.</i>		water.

(In the absence of a copula sign in Bali, I use a dash to avoid prejudging the issue.)

It does not follow from this that black or water can be simply predicated of Wisnu ('Wisnu is black' is a different kind of attribution from 'Wisnu is water'). At various times I have heard inferences using one of the following comparisons (in stage 3 of reasoning):

- a. As a person's thoughts (*manah*), or intentions (*tetujon* which translates equally as 'direction' or 'goal') move the body, so does water move by the intentions or thoughts of Wisnu.
- b. As kings are said to control (*magambel*) their subjects, so does Wisnu control water.
- b. As food contains nourishment (*merta*), so does water contain Wisnu.
- c. As the headman of this village is called such-and-such, so water is called Wisnu.

The last is clearly an equative, rather than a predicative, sentence (on the significance of the difference, see Lyons 1977: 185ff.). All the inferences are, however, treated as speculative by virtue of the distance between the nature of the subject and the comparisons.

Deliberate contradiction is also used to indicate uncertainty. If someone is asked, for instance, whether they are tired, it is not uncommon to reply:

5. *Yèn (ngaraos) lesu, lesu;*  
*yèn (ngaraos) 'ten lesu, 'ten lesu.*  
If (one says) one is tired, one is tired;  
If (one says) one is not tired, one is not tired.

It was usually agreed this cryptic remark should be read as follows. If one is working and is asked if one is tired, one might not be but might become so later, or *vice versa*. Then one is embarrassed by telling what turns out to be a falsehood. So it is better deliberately to equivocate (*ngèmpèlin*) over what is still unsure.

The example may help to clear up another curious construction. The expression runs:

- 5a. *Yèning Batara kabaos alit, alit pisan;*  
*yèning Batara kabaos ageng, ageng pisan.*

If God is said to be small, It is very (too) small;  
if God is said to be big, It is very (too) big.

This was usually explained in terms of the nature of *manah*. Gods are non-manifest; therefore they have no size or form, and can as well be said to be infinitely large or infinitely small. If one says they are big, they are too big to see; if one says they are small, they are too small to see. To speak of gods (a manifest activity) is due to one's *manah*, one's desire or disposition to picture them a certain way. The agent's thoughts or feelings are seen as an active part of knowledge, speculation and speech – a point which suggests that the relationship of representations, or texts, and the audience is quite different from the neutral role we tend to impute to recipients of culture.

There are other circumstances under which deliberate contradiction may be used, as in the following example where a prince was speaking about a very powerful neighbour.

5b. *Yèning Cokorda derika ngandika putih selem miwah selem putih, bènjang putih dados selem, selem dados putih ring panjak-panjakidané.*

If the Cokorda (the prince's caste title) there says white is black and black white, the next day for the populace (literally: his slaves) white becomes black and black white.

Subsequent explanation made it clear that the prince had in mind his neighbour's power to order convention at will, not to change colours. Contradiction is used to signal an authoritative utterance, here one that is counter-factual or, better, in defiance of general Balinese usage. Among other things, this example indicates the Balinese sensitivity to the role of power in determining convention; and the potential weaknesses of the fourth path to knowledge, speech (*sabda*).

### **Practical reason**

What bearing do Balinese ideas of inference have on the practical use of reason? If *manah* shapes perception and cognition, it is hard to generalize about the relation of means to ends, separate from individual interests in specific contexts. Like many peoples, including ourselves in day to day life, Balinese seem to stress situational logic, in a broad sense, not seeking timeless and dubious universals.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> There is no room to discuss every aspect of so vast a subject as rationality here. Omissions include Weber's distinction of *Zweckrationalität* and *Wertrationalität*, partly because of the degree to which they rest upon an increasingly questionable distinction between fact and value (see Putnam 1981). Of more interest is the stress placed by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory on the notion that knowledge (and therefore the kind of 'rational' procedures appropriate to its exploitation) depends on the purposes to which it is directed - a view with which the Balinese I know would heartily concur. Habermas, for example distinguishes three such purposes: technical interests served by empirical-analytical sciences, practical interests using historical-hermeneutic methods, and an emancipatory cognitive interest requiring a critical approach (1978: 302ff.). The dangers of confusing these levels and also of mixing rationality and rationales is neatly spelled out.

Discussion of practical reason often overlooks the degree to which models vary culturally and historically in assumptions about the nature of humans and society. This affects the definition of ends, what means are legitimate or efficient, and even what self-interest is (both ‘self’ and ‘interest’ being notoriously hard to define). If one allows too much into context, anything can be made rational or logical (see Gellner: 1970: 26ff.). A simple-minded utilitarianism is still fashionable, despite the serious weaknesses of models of humans as ‘maximizing’, ‘minimizing’ or ‘satisficing’ (see Ryan 1978).<sup>21</sup>

*Il y a une infinité de conduites qui paroissent ridicules et dont les raisons cachées sont très sage et très solides. (La Rochefoucauld, Maximes CLXIII.)*<sup>22</sup>

One way round these difficulties is to argue that there *must* be some universal ‘material-object language’, in terms of which humans everywhere approach ‘reality’ because in practice humans are so adept at adapting means to ends (Horton 1979). On close inspection, however, all this says is that those who still survive have adjusted to their environment enough to have not yet died. To infer from this the existence of a universal practical reason is far-fetched.<sup>23</sup> It assumes, for

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From everyday experience we know that ideas serve often enough to furnish our actions with justifying motives in place of the real ones. What is called rationalization at this level is called ideology at the level of collective action. In both cases the manifest content of statements is falsified by consciousness’ unreflected tie to interests, despite its illusion of autonomy (1978: 311).

My slight concern here is how easy it is to establish real interests, while reference to levels and to consciousness suggests a lingering essentialism at work.

<sup>21</sup> Versions vary according to the balance between exclusive self-interest and mutual distrust (see Olson 1965, and an excellent critique by Ions 1977: 38ff.) and embody questionable methodological assumptions about ‘individualism’ (Lukes 1973b; cf. Rorty, A. 1976; Marriott 1976; and Dumont 1977). Hollis is refreshingly honest about the problems in his view of rationality if recognition of the collective is allowed (1977: 188ff).

<sup>22</sup> ‘There are an infinite number of ways of behaving, which appear ridiculous and of which the hidden reasons are very wise and very substantial.’

<sup>23</sup> The shortcomings of reason in dealing with the world are pithily exposed by Ambrose Bierce.

The basis of logic is the syllogism, consisting of a major and a minor premise and a conclusion - thus:

*Major Premise* Sixty men can do a piece of work sixty times as quickly as one man.

a start, that people necessarily do the same things for the same reasons. Worse, it implies that reason is the sufficient condition of action, a curiously idealist assumption for what claims to be a common-sensical stance. After all, it is one thing to trace the rationale behind action *ex post facto*, it is quite another to state that reasons are the causes of action (cf. Hollis 1977: 185ff, who is commendably cautious here). Is such adjustment desirable anyway? For

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man. (Shaw *Maxims for revolutionists* 238.)

Returning to the Balinese, talk about rational means to ends without referring to the situation and to the actor is held to be *gabeng*, ill-formed and incomplete (the word is used of empty ears of rice). In place of a dichotomy of means and ends, Balinese commonly recognize a triad, by adding the agent with his, or her, tastes, perceptions, emotions and interests. Rather than typify some ‘essential’ person (‘the reasonable man’ - but never woman! - see Herbert 1935), the Balinese I know tended to stress the differences between people, even among family and friends. If we assume homogeneity, Balinese come closer to assuming diversity.

For Balinese villagers even apparently basic collective representations, from laws to ritual, are liable to be revised situationally in the light of *désa*, *kala*, *patra*, place, occasion and circumstance, according to the interests, or perspectives, of those involved. Given their presuppositions about the non-manifest, relevant context is likely to include *niskala*, however unverifiable its effects. So what we might dismiss as ‘ritual’ should be seen as linked to the uncertainty that action in the world – say in rice cultivation, at which the Balinese are most technically proficient – is adequate in itself.

Arguably Balinese are at least as consistent as we. Rationality is, after all, hardly a clear concept and, like the Tseu, we invoke it more often to express a commitment to its cultural importance than to say what it is. Far from rationality always being opposed to ritual, we

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*Minor Premise* One man can dig a post-hole in sixty seconds; therefore –  
*Conclusion* Sixty men can dig a post-hole in one second.  
This may be called the syllogism arithmetical, in which, by combining logic and mathematics, we obtain a double certainty and are twice blessed (1958: 79).

ourselves revel in rituals of rationality: the genre of gangland films portrays excessive or narrow practical reason; exotic tourism is less often an encounter with the Other than a confirmation of superiority; politics is often the dramatic display – or replay – of class or cultural predilections as rational interest, as perhaps are seminars and books on rationality! ‘Rational’ is ultimately always what we are, or I am; ‘irrational’ is what others, or you, are. To paraphrase von Clausewitz, ‘Reason is nothing more than the continuation of prejudice by other means.’

### **Implicit Presuppositions**

Two other glaring presuppositions in discussions of rationality need brief mention. These are ‘the psychic unity of mankind’ and ‘homogeneity’. The idea that human nature is the same everywhere rests upon a questionable distinction of the individual *versus* society (which led Durkheim among others into a dubious ontology, Lukes 1973a: 3ff.). For it makes little sense to account for variation socially, while holding human nature constant, unless the two are held to be distinct. Arguably individuals and societies are not reified entities but relationships, in which cultural conceptions of one affect the other, or better both are mutually constituted (cf. Bhaskar 1979: 39-47, on a naturalist attempt to retain the dichotomy). The impact of hypostatizing the distinction has been to create endless confusion as to whether rationality is to be predicated of collective representations, individual humans or whatever. It does not solve the problem of rationality: it merely clouds the issue.

Now Balinese commonly start from an intriguingly different set of presuppositions about human nature, which imply the diversity, rather than unity of human beings. The human psyche has three constituents, familiar to Indologists, the *triguna*: *sattwa*, knowledge or purity, *raja(h)*, emotion or passion, and *tamas*, desire or ignorance. These are linked to three goals of human life, the *triwarga*: *darma*, the disposition to do good, *art(h)a*, the pursuit of wealth or prestige, and *kama*, the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. The Balinese Chain of Being is founded upon three processes also: *bayu*, energy, *sabda*, speech, and *idep*, thought (see Chapter 2 for a discussion). Plants are energy systems only; animals have both energy and the capacity for simple sounds; humans possess thoughts as well; while Gods shade off into pure thought.

So potential conflict between aspects of personality is built in. For Balinese, knowledge, like logic, is empty and boring without emotion to provide interest (cf. de Sousa on the link of rationality and emotion in salience 1980: 128ff.). The implications for practical reasons are interesting. As Taylor remarks, to the Greeks

to say that man is a rational animal is to say that this is his telos, the goal he implicitly is directed towards by nature. To achieve it is to attain happiness and well-being' (1982: 95).

In contrast to the *summum bonum* (supreme good) of happiness reached by reason working on the world, Balinese have to balance different goals, different faculties and different drives. Their world is more complex and, to my mind, psychologically more perceptive, than one where humans strive mono-maniacally, towards a single universally admired *telos*.

A penchant for dichotomies in Western academic discourse has actually created much of the rationality debate. Not only must propositions be true or false, but statements analytical or synthetic, truths necessary or contingent, assertions literal or metaphorical, representations accurate or inaccurate, reason practical or pure, actions rational or irrational, and people objective or subjective. Oddly, dualism is often held to be the attribute of 'primitive societies', not of ourselves – an example of the tendency to displace onto 'the Other' what is uncomfortable or unspeakable in our own categories.

Dichotomous taxonomies further tend to assume a simple-minded reading of Occam's razor. Not only do all peoples' doings and sayings in a culture admit of a single explanation, but every culture presents the same kind of material to be explained in the same way! One can, of course, happily reduce other cultures to homogeneous pabulum to be fed into a universalist mill by suitable selection and translation (as, despite his protests, does Horton 1982). Unfortunately this begs most of the interesting questions and is inimical to empirical ethnography, which might establish whether it has any ground or not. An anthropologist who adopts the homogeneity axiom is liable to find he has slit his own throat on Occam's razor.

The presupposition of homogeneity has another aspect. It leads easily to assuming the possibility, desirability or inevitability of

consistency of thought, a coherence between thought and the state of the world, and order in that world. The concept of order in Western thought is problematic at the best of times (see Bohm 1980; Kuntz 1968; Talbot 1981). So it is worrying when order is presupposed in analyses of other cultures; and not considered as a proper topic for investigation. We have to date precious little idea of how people in other cultures conceive of, represent, or assume order.

The horny old trap of translation still remains. For how does one translate without a translational scheme? A 'bridgehead' of postulated equivalences is not so much necessary and sufficient, as a pragmatic point of departure, to be discarded or modified when it has served its purpose.

Radical translation anyway is never a one-off business. It is a dialectic in which assumptions are modified as knowledge builds up. This will presumably differ for each culture, or its preferred interpretational schemes. So the idea of critical ethnography suggests an empirical way out of the translational trap without destroying 'the Other' with imported taxonomies. The metaphor of mirror equivalences gives way to gradually accumulated knowledge. We might have to start with a view of language and logic as mirroring the world somehow, but we land in trouble if we stop there and do not pass through the looking-glass. If we stay put, we may find 'The mirror cracked from side to side.' And we know what happened to that unfortunate mirror-gazer.

There is a well-known story told by old Balinese hands. In the version I know best, two Dutch scholars, Grader and Hooykaas, were sitting with Miguel Covarrubias, a Mexican cartoonist and ironically author of the best known book on Bali, and talking to a Balinese priest. At one point Grader interrupted to correct the priest's language, according to prevailing Dutch grammatical ideas about Balinese. A few minutes later a dog in the compound began to bark and Covarrubias turned to Grader and asked him why he did not teach the dog to bark properly! The danger of wearing the blinkers of reason is that one lands up teaching the Balinese how to bark.

## **APPENDIX**

Contraries of 'rational' and 'reason', or their synonyms in common English usage.

### 1. RATIONALITY

intellectuality	v	affectivity
humanity	v	animality
culture	v	nature
objectivity	v	subjectivity
universality	v	particularity
generality	v	specificity
rational	v	empirical
necessity	v	contingency
science	v	arts

### 2. REASON

reason	v	emotion
-	v	folly
-	v	madness
-	v	intuition
-	v	mysticism
-	v	fantasy
-	v	imagination
-	v	romance
-	v	magic
-	v	superstition
-	v	experience
-	v	instinct
-	v	understanding (Kant)
-	v	cause
-	v	action
-	v	biological drives
-	v	violence
-	v	chaos

### 3. LOGIC

logic	v	fact
logical	v	empirical

necessary	v	arbitrary
sense	v	nonsense
meaningful	v	meaningless
reflective	v	unreflective
<i>Zweckrationalität</i>	v	<i>Wertrationalität</i>