

# THE PRIMORDIAL ROOTS OF BEING

by *Edward C. P. Stewart*

*Abstract.* Suffering, alongside the feeling of sanctity of life, pervades human experience, generating primal anxiety, which humans learn to shore up with social solidarity and with the practice of communication in religious rituals. The roots of social belonging spring from the primordial sentiments toward ethnicity, race, language, religion, customs and traditions, and region. Self-identity, mediated by mental formations derived from social relations, is composed of thinking and values. Daily experience reveals that cultural differences produce blind spots in thinking and barriers in values—governing areas of activity, social relations, the world, and identity of being—that impedes cross-cultural understanding.

*Keywords:* cultural barriers to communication; cultural values and thinking; primal anxiety; primordial belonging and being; primordial sentiments; social humanism of religion.

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In the sixth century B.C. there was born to a rajah, the ruler of a small principality on the southern border of present-day Nepal, a son who was to become known as the Buddha. During his childhood the gifted boy was shielded from all forms of misery and unhappiness by the rajah, who kept him confined within the palace grounds. After he reached adolescence he disobeyed his father and secretly went forth into nearby villages accompanied by a faithful servant. On these fateful journeys he saw an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a mendicant holy man (Ross 1966, 85). The three sights of human suffering detonated inside the youth and impelled him to confront the grim realities of life, and the fourth sight, that of the holy man, suggested the way to do this. Eventually, the future Buddha left his wife and son and went forth alone into the outside world to seek the cause and cure of man's suffering (Ross 1966, 88). The enlightenment that Buddha attained,

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canonizing suffering as a Noble Truth, eventually became Buddhism (Hanayama 1967, 45).

#### PRIMORDIAL ANXIETY AND SANCTITY OF LIFE

Although Buddha's attitude cannot be considered definitive, the pervasiveness of suffering in human experience seems universal. Variations of three recurrent themes reflecting on human fate must appear in any explanation escaping shallowness (Kaufmann 1978, 60-61). The first theme is impermanence. Life is brief. The idea dominates Buddhism and also Shintoism in Japan. Humanity lives in a phenomenal world which is an illusion. The real world of the senses is created and destroyed moment to moment in an endless chain of being and nonbeing. When Buddhism reached Japan, the illusionary quality of the world gave way to the Japanese belief in the absoluteness of the phenomenal world (Nakamura 1964, 350-61), but brief life retained its grip on the Japanese imagination, expressed in cultural symbols such as the cherry blossom. In the West, the idea of impermanence under Greek influences of individualism acquires a meaning of triviality. Since the Western world is usually material, suggesting durability, impermanence reflects uncertainty of meaning, of direction and harbors the suspicion that humanity, as Plato suggested, is only "God's plaything" and that nothing in life is worthy of seriousness (Kaufmann 1978, 62).

The second theme is that of radical inequality of people (Kaufmann 1978, 65-69). That humans are imperfect and incomplete seems to be a universal idea. Olivia Vlahos makes the interesting argument that prehistoric cave paintings, as well as world-wide customs, reveal the practice of decorating the human body, reflecting the human desire to complete and improve it (Vlahos 1979, 34). The presumed incompleteness accentuates the need for others. It is the group that survives, not the individual.

The third theme is a frightening development of the inequality of humanity and finds its classical formulation in Latin: *homo homini lupus*, man is a wolf to man (Kaufmann 1978, 69). Cicero, Seneca, and the Romans generally seem to have been the best witnesses to this human theme, although a distinguished Japanese political scientist, Jun-ichi Kyogoku, uses the theme to describe Japanese actions outside the group in what he calls the battlefield of competition (Kyogoku 1985). Death and destructive forces in the East often assume definite shapes, as with Hinduism in the form of the god Shiva. In the West, death forces remain vague.

Although Buddha's intricate analysis of mind stresses human suffering, Buddhist thought associates human consciousness much more

with joy than with pain (Jacobson 1966, 70). The Buddha's teachings amply accommodate the Western belief of the *sanctity of life*, understood as an exalted appreciation for the vitality of the organism. The primordial experience of being alive extends beyond corporeal physiology to include perception, reason, and imagination. It is a proto-religious experience of a "natural metaphysic," centering on continuing vitality of the individual's own breed and progeny, and of the territorial and civil groups of the species (Shils 1975, 233).

Sanctity of life is a universal value, but it is not equally extended to all people. The human acceptance of the inequality of human beings guides distribution of the value to follow sociological lines of primordial groups, the lineage of the past and the progeny of the future, and of groups linked by civil ties (Shils 1975, 225-26). The life of a member of the family is more valuable than that of someone distant and certainly more than that of an enemy soldier. Human social systems emerge from lineage. Social boundaries define the members who belong and also those who are outsiders, particularly enemies. In some groups, internal cohesion depends upon the posed threat from outsiders. When boundaries exist beyond the civil and lineage groups, fear and destruction overwhelm life's sanctity. Nevertheless, a link remains always among humans, if only as in war, such as between our own soldiers and the enemy.

The commitment to the sacredness of life founders on impermanence which invokes universal anxiety toward death and toward destruction. Sanctity of life must assimilate death to incorporate human emotion and instill power into myth and religion. Resolution of life and death lies beyond logical grasp; death in life must be accepted intuitively and the anxiety reduced through traditional customs and religious rituals.

Braced by sacredness of life, the individual's psychic energies act through religious work of the community, creating social solidarities and containing primal anxiety. In ancient Greek religion, Walter Burkert writes as follows:

From a historical point of view the psychological and sociological aspects can be reconciled, at least in principle, by the hypothesis that the development of social forms, including religious rituals, and the development of psychic functions have proceeded in constant interaction, so that in terms of the tradition the one is always attuned to the other. . . . The religion finds legitimation as tradition by proving itself a formative force of continuity from generation to generation. Ritual, in its outward aspect, is a programme of demonstrative acts to be performed in set sequence and often at a set place and time—sacred insofar as every omission or deviation arouses deep anxiety and calls forth sanctions. As communication and social imprinting, ritual establishes and secures the solidarity of the closed group; in this function it has doubtless accompanied the forms of human community since the earliest of times (Burkert 1985), 3-4, 8).

The conclusions about religious ritual, communication, social solidarity, and anxiety drawn by Burkert seem universal in their general form. For instance, Greek developments can be compared with early Indian thought, which is analogical and centers round the symbolism of the sacrifice (Jayatilleke 1963, 21-31). Buddhism, in the view of Nolan Jacobson, is a "technique" for coping with the "anxiety-producing tensions of life" (1966, 49). These and other similar statements we shall generalize and conclude that the human suffering associated with impermanence, inequality, and death-destruction generates primal anxiety in humans. The generic human response to appease anxiety is the participation in rituals and traditions that strengthen group solidarity.

*Social actualities and primordial sentiments.* No other form of life enters the world as helpless as a human being at birth. Human offspring require years of care and training before becoming full-fledged members of society. Each one first survives and then grows up as a member of a small group of people constituting the family. Means of communication and social relations among its members eventually are internalized by the child. These representations become the psychic content for personality. The primacy of social processes in the formation of the individual and eventually of the society is preserved in its most pristine form perhaps in Japanese society, where the person is referred to as role-personality (Lebra 1976, 250).

In the West, the social origins of mental functions and of identity have been neglected, in part because of the influence of individualism, which creates the perception that development of mind and of human relationships evolves from individual needs. American social scientists are more likely to explain social processes according to the psychology of the individual instead of the reverse. There are exceptions to this Western approach, particularly in Europe. In Freudian psychology, social relations between the child and the parent figure go underground and appear in the form of unconscious processes. The most important exception is found in the work of the Russian psychologist Lev Semenovich Vygotsky and his followers. In the period of 1924 to 1934, Vygotsky attempted to formulate psychology on Marxist foundations. One of the fundamental assumptions adopted was the Marxist thesis that human nature represents internalized social relations. Vygotsky and his followers have taken significant steps in explaining how social relations become psychological functions and form the structure of the individual personality (Wertsch 1985, 58). This view understands that even private functions such as thinking originate in social processes. Thus the primordial group into which the child is born exercises

formative influence on the personality of the adult; a general identity of the individual is determined by membership in the web of primordial relations of the family group.

The members of the family are bound together by bloodline, physical resemblance, similar customs, tradition, and common fate. When these dimensions of social relations are examined in the context of society, several social actualities emerge, providing identity and belonging for the individual extending beyond the immediate context of the family. The small circle of family may enlarge to include hundreds, thousands, or even millions that are considered to belong to the same lineage. The boundaries defining the extended family—tribe or clan—vary from society to society, and so does the meaning of the grouping; but in some form all seem to live with the social actuality of *ethnicity*.

Personal belonging and identity begin with the body-image. Some inherited physical differences such as skin color, facial features, head shapes, color and texture of hair, and proportions of limbs are unevenly distributed among human populations. Enough clustering of similar physical features exists among different groups to provide the base for the formation of group boundaries according to *race*.

Anguish about the impermanence of the human estate, commitment to sanctity of life, and fear of aggression and destructiveness give rise to human practices and beliefs that are called *religion*. In some form all groups of human beings develop rituals and idealized beliefs to cope with suffering, death, power, and destruction.

At the core of religion is communication, which is predominantly mediated through *language*. The modes of expression in language learned from childhood leave their stamp upon all human experience (Burkert 1985, 268).

Besides religion and language, *customs and traditions* involve the psychic functions of humans in communication. This social actuality extends into all areas of life, including religion in the form of rituals and sacrifices.

The social actuality of *region* is the broadest of all. A given region may be characterized by the features of geography, its economy, or perhaps by the use of language or dialect. In other regions, the distinguishing mark may be differences in customs and traditions. Finally different ethnic or racial groups may have settled in parts of a country, giving the region an ethnic or racial character.

The six social actualities—race, ethnicity, religion, language, customs and tradition, and region—do not constitute an exhaustive list. Mythology and art, for instance, as social actualities could appear in some periods of history or for some countries. The social implications

of the actualities vary from one part of the world to another. Their significance stems from two factors, psychology and politics.

The reality created by the social actualities produces a sense of naturalness and normality. One's native language, for example, for almost everyone, will seem to be the natural way of talking. This sensibility has been called a primordial sentiment and gives rise to primordial affinities and bonds (Shils 1957). The social origin of the primordial sentiments exercises a pervasive influence on behavior that is difficult to detect, since the effect normally is not detached. Only when deprived of its natural social actuality does the primordial bond stand out. For example, some Americans living in Japan for decades, and speaking fluent Japanese, still prefer to attend church services conducted in English, affirming a primordial sentiment toward their native tongue. Language also serves to show the social effects of the primordial sentiments.

Perhaps the most significant demonstration of the power of primordial sentiments occurs in areas of political and civil ties. The dual nature of language, concrete and contextualized on the one hand and abstract on the other, has been exploited in communication, linking identity and nationalism. The strategic use of language to serve national integration was proposed by the German Johann von Herder. Linguistic nationalism became a product of German romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Edwards 1985, 23). In the period of the 1930s, language along with other primordial sentiments was used to mobilize the German people under Nazism.

In the modern world, historical events of colonization, modernization, and conquest have formed countries which include within their political boundaries diverse groups with conflicting primordial sentiments. Frequently, bonds based on ideology fail to integrate all groups into a civil, national state. Since the end of World War II, innumerable revolutions, rebellions, and separatist movements have occurred throughout the world. In the majority of cases, these violent political movements have generated political power from primordial sentiments. In India, the recent disorders in the Punjab disclose severe tension between the region, its religious community, and the civil state of India.

Social actualities causing political disturbance now or in recent years include race in Africa, ethnicity in Iran, language in Canada, customs and traditions in Indonesia, and region in India. The revolution of 1979 in Iran was based on religion. In Lebanon, it has been religion, region, and ethnicity. In fact the determination of the six primordial sentiments is based on investigations of political integration in countries throughout the world since World War II (Geertz 1973, 255-310).

Once the conditions for political dissension are understood, it is easier to find examples of primordial sentiments that are compatible, instead of conflicting, with civil ties. Israel is a nation using Hebrew for political integration on the primordial appeal of region. Japan historically has shown consummate skill in using all the primordial sentiments to forge perhaps the most united nation today among the major powers of the world. Norway, divided by rugged mountains, shows a surprising political integration despite regional divisions and distinct ways of life and language in various regions of the country.

*Diffuse and concrete belonging.* Primordial solidarity within the group can be considered to form relativistic patterns of thinking and value systems, constructing an interdependent mind. Belonging stresses membership in the group. First, human beings are chiefly concerned with justice in their own concrete situations as they perceive it. Second, they are more responsive generally to persons and to immediately present authorities than they are to symbols of remote persons, to the total status system of the society, or to abstract justice. The average person responds peripherally to central authority and to symbols of the society. Third, political leaders engage the consciousness and interest of most citizens only at events such as elections or at time of crisis. Fourth, during seasons such as Easter or Christmas or on the occasion of the death of a family member, christening of a child, or at a wedding, the average person engages in communion with divinity. Fifth, for the rest of the time, the social, political, and sacred values of the society are suspended under the distractions of specific tasks, permitting the individual to innovate and adapt to the ambiguities of concrete problems (Shils 1975, 111).

The identity produced by the patterns of diffuse and contextualized belonging introduces psychic forces described by Freudian psychology, particularly the process of identification. The functional context required for understanding the being of an interdependent mind includes communication. Of the six social actualities, three have structures and are psychic functions (language, religion, customs and traditions), while the other three (ethnicity, race, region) are more like processes of belonging only. The being of the individual is a process of participation in family groups and in social life according to socially sanctioned and traditional forms, establishing both *belonging* and *identity*. These conditions for social belonging suggest indifference for the social order, raising the question of how society canalizes the behavior of its members according to its norms. In Shils's view, modern society is integrated by a loose constellation of ties: "It is held together by an infinity of personal attachments, moral obligations in concrete con-

texts, professional and creative pride, individual ambition, primordial affinities, and a civil sense which is low in many, high in some, and moderate in most persons" (Shils 1975, 112).

Shils's contextual explanation should be considered as an alternative to the view of many social scientists which endows an individual with an absolute and independent mind. Economists, for instance, are generally persuaded that a human being is a rational decision maker who weighs alternatives and risks according to a utility function solely in terms of pay-offs; however, in decision making, accumulating evidence shows that decision makers do not rationally assess risks, nor conform with rationality (Fischhoff et al. 1981). Psychologists find a center in the personality and motivation of the individual; yet, in the field of anthropology and social psychology, evidence indicates a relationship between social forms and style of thinking (Cole & Scribner 1974; Cohen 1969). For instance, specialized roles predispose analysis and abstraction of thought. Sigmund Freud would have nodded approval at the compromise of the absolute and independent mind.

Western religion has long accepted that faith is governed by belief. To the degree that belief is internalized as an abstraction and separated from the substance of living, the believer is individualistic and independent of social groups. But the contextual explanation asserts that faith may rely more on tradition, habit, and participation than on beliefs of primordial religious groups (Shils 1975, 123), again displaying the effects of social forms (Burkert 1985, 248, 275).

The compromising of the absolute and independent mind, hinged to belief, carries important implications. First, the investigation of beliefs, ideas, and representations is meaningful only when incorporated within a comprehensive functional context (Burkert 1985, 3). Second, social relations are based on several social actualities (Geertz 1973, 253-310) which generate primordial sentiments associated with belonging and identity. Most Western societies have developed secondary social structures and ideology, creating a society which often separates civil and primal bonds. But the strength of the secondary affiliations of civil ties and ideology, apart from primal and social bonds, has been exaggerated, obscuring the nature of belonging and identity.

*Religion as social relations.* The social origins of religion briefly mentioned in the preceding sections describe early Christianity as well as all other religions. The social relations among the early Christians were idealized into a religion of primordial belonging. It was later that Christianity became a religion of belief and accepted doctrines that permeated the Western perception, obscuring the origins of all religions in primal anxiety and in the social conditions of life. A compari-



son between Shintoism and Christianity should clarify doctrines of Christianity that go beyond the communal base of all religions.

The most striking difference between Shintoism and Christianity is, first, the transcendentalism of Christian beliefs. Japanese Shintoism is committed to an earthly cosmology and confines its influence to this life and how to conduct it. Christian concern with after-life places emphasis on belief and faith, since the other life is beyond human perception and knowledge. An understanding of it is, second, sought and achieved by means of revelations, which are accepted as articles of faith; with Shintoism there are no Bibles and no revelations. Third, perhaps it is the emphasis on belief and faith that makes Christianity and also Islam exclusive. These religions institutionalize initiation of members, profession of faith, and exclusion of membership in other religious groups. In contrast, the Japanese perspective permits someone to be part Shinto, part Christian, and part Buddhist. Furthermore, Christianity is a universal and proselytizing religion and hence applicable to all people and not only to selected groups. Shinto neither proselytizes nor is it universal. Fourth, Christians believe in a savior, and the religion offers the hope of personal salvation. Neither the savior nor the personal religious bond is part of Shintoism or Buddhism. Christianity offers the believers, fifth, an absolute view of the world in which theism is stressed, and absolute right and wrong, good and evil are exclusively separated. This approach leads to the formation of morality. Eastern ways of thought found in Shintoism and in Japanese Buddhism avoid absolutism of all kinds. Thus religious work is aimed at reducing internal tensions, and the canons of morality do not become detached. These five qualities separate Christianity from Shintoism and, except for universal religion, also separate it from Buddhism. These five features of Christianity are often used as the criteria of religion so that Westerners often wonder whether Shintoism is a religion. This Western view of religion disregards the humanism of religion, the idealization of human relations, which is universal to all religions including Christianity.

In addition to the formal aspects, Christianity has adopted two values which separate most Westerners from Japanese and, to a lesser degree, from other Asians. First, humanity is a special speciation as the chosen creature of God and occupies a special status in the world. The second cultural value is lineal time. The ancient Hebrews were the first to develop the idea of a historical past, which replaced the mythic sense of time. They also developed the idea of time as an extension of the past to the present and beyond to the future. This concept of lineal time is prominent with Christians and provides the temporal concept for developing the idea of progress. Others live with cyclic concepts of time

or with the principle of continuous creation (Campbell 1968, 24). These two values, of humanity and of time, have consequences for communication between the West and the East.

Westerners typically forget the sources of religion in human relations, defending materiality of the human condition against the transitoriness of life and the destructiveness of humanity. In the social sciences, Emile Durkheim is usually identified with restoring the insight that religion derives from the ties among people, and not from a belief in the supernatural or in gods. In this view, shared sentiments develop as affective bonds which are expressed in social emblems that assume a sacred character, are worshipped in a ritualized form, and transmitted from generation to generation through communion and ritual. Religion is the symbolization of the social bond and the consciousness of society (Bell 1980, 43-44).

Durkheim's view has been well accepted by writers concerned with culture. In a recent review of four leading figures—Peter Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas—three have substantive treatments of religion. Douglas addressed the apparent decline of ritual and religion under the impact of modernization but finds that, until social relations disappear, religion and ritual will play a role. Religion is generated in social relations which change with modernization but do not disappear (Wuthnow et al. 1984, 128-29). Berger's view of religion reaches farther out into the unknown than that of Douglas. He defines religion as a humanly constructed universe of meaning. In his religious beliefs, humans attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant. Collective symbolizations of the supernatural are institutionalized into a symbolic universe, as a canopy over the world of everyday life (Wuthnow et al. 1984, 149).

Habermas falls into a different category from our point of view. Although he is not explicit on Durkheim's hypothesis, his general attitude can be well accommodated. He writes that applications of religion have become limited to problems of personal meaning and of social integration. Religion is a mediating link between moral action and cognitive world views, with the function of making suffering understandable and bearable. But there is one special function that religion can play:

If properly conceived, it can facilitate the process of communication. Habermas points to recent theological work by Pannenberg, Moltmann, and Metz as examples. In these writings, God is conceived as an abstraction with characteristics resembling those put forth by Habermas as features of ideal communication. The concept of God symbolizes the process binding together a community of individuals striving for emancipation. God, in Habermas's works, "becomes the name for a communicative structure that forces men, on pain of loss of their humanity, to go beyond their accidental, empirical nature to encounter

one another *indirectly*, that is, across an objective something that they themselves are not" (Wuthnow et al. 1984, 232).

This humanistic view of religion received brilliant support in Burkert's analysis of Greek religion. The pantheon of Olympian gods in the Greek polytheistic religion are assembled in a group of eleven to thirteen gods and goddesses. They appear as a family community, differentiated as parents and children, male and female, indoors and outdoors, old and young, and as central members and outsiders. The Greek gods make up a richly contrasted and highly differentiated group (Burkert 1985, 218-25). The world of the Olympian gods owed its splendor to its remoteness from death. Yet these gods could not represent the all-embracing richness of reality; religion included relations with the dead and with the heroes, who existed between gods and humans. The hero cult is conceived as the earth (chthonic) counterpart to the worship of the gods and derives from the influence of epic poetry. "Greek epic set up an autonomous world which is deliberately presented as a greater and more beautiful past: the heroes were more powerful than mortals are now. At the same time, this became a common spiritual world for all Greeks; reality was interpreted on this basis. Families and cities took pride in being able to connect their traditions with the heroes of epic" (Burkert 1985, 204).

In the passage, Burkert hints at the role of the Greek language in epic poetry used to create a world of heroes separate from that of daily routines. The cult of the common heroes of the land became expressions of group solidarity. The hero cult replaced the cult of the dead, but it was not an ancestor cult at all; its concern was with effective presence, not with the chain of blood across generations (Burkert 1985, 204). The gods retain distance from both the heroes and human beings, but they are seen in contrast to the underworld gods, chthonian powers, who are only darkly revealed in Hades. The heroes and their cults are the living contact with the powers of death. Greek religion was a psychological projection of Greek society, containing within its meaning a representation of both the reality and the ideal of the Greeks.

#### CULTURAL IDENTITY

Turning to the analysis of cultural identity, we shall refer to the psychological functions as *mental formations*, replacing the more technical name of cognitive functional systems (Cole & Scribner 1974, 192-94). The term *mental formations* is selected to refer to the organization of basic processes of perceiving (perception), thinking, remembering (memory), valuing (values), and judging (judgment), which are mobilized for an interaction with the environment to attain a goal or to

fulfill a purpose. Examples of mental formations are found in decision making, problem solving, patterns of communication, and models of learning. Mental formations emphasize the practical and contextualized nature of the basic processes, often loosely summarized as thinking and values, and they define the cultural being of the individual. Since the formations derive from social relations, they reveal the imprint of primordial sentiments and of social processes of society. These psychological functions are sufficiently decontextualized to appear in consciousness of individuals as a definition of their self-identity, while the primordial sentiments enter into consciousness more as belonging and social identity.

There are two important differences between social actualities and the psychological functions that lead us to speak of mental formations. First, the mental formations are internalized control mechanisms for guiding and controlling behavior, and, in consciousness, they receive psychological rather than social recognition of the social actualities. Second, the mental formations function to organize diversity among members of the communicating community. For instance, all Japanese conform to the abstraction of using honorifics in conversation, but individuals employ the three principles of honorifics—exaltation, humility, politeness—to select a way of speaking that is different from another communicator. The teacher, speaking to a student, guides his speech with the principle of politeness, but the student responds guiding his speech with the principle of exaltation. Thus the cultural values and patterns of thinking undergirding mental formations govern the organization of diversity in communication.

#### BLIND SPOTS IN THINKING

Using a socio-historical approach to contemporary blind spots in thinking, we return to the ancient Greeks to find precedents which still cause misunderstandings today in communication. Among the ancient Greeks, the category of art served as a vehicle of individual insight and experience (Campbell 1968, 32). Explanations of objects and beginnings were made in the form of poetry, but when the philosophers appeared, around the fifth century B.C., they discarded poetry, turned to natural language, bodily took over from tradition the subjects of objects and beginnings, and explained them explicitly by new concepts. Philosophers such as Plato left enduring mental products to future generations in the West.

Fundamental to Plato was the dichotomy between abstract (the idea) and concrete (the thing). By the time of Aristotle, philosophers offered rules of classification, identity, relations, and causation among the principles of logic and philosophy. Much of the analysis conducted by

the Greeks was based on the Greek social actuality of language. Since Greek belongs to the Indo-European family of languages, those cultures with languages belonging to the linguistic group should be receptive to the logical and philosophical innovations culminating in Aristotle. For example, English, an Indo-European language like Greek, possesses the grammatical construction of a subject-predicate, which tends to suggest a fixed relationship between subjects or things and their attributes. (Snow is white and the grass is green.) The grammatical construction encourages digital thinking (off-on) rather than analogic thought conveying a process. English is a difficult language to use to describe processes or conditions which are not clearly one way or another. English is also an actor-oriented language which tends to represent the world for action in the form of actor-action-result. These features of English leave imprints on the representation of experience similar to those of the logic of Greek philosophy (Fisher 1972, 119-20). Once the philosophical inventions were made, any language with compatible structure becomes receptive to similar processes of thought. Neither Chinese nor Japanese are Indo-European languages. Therefore, as we might expect, logical structures in the cultures do not resemble those of American culture.

The dichotomy, as in the Western separation of abstract from concrete, appears to be universal (Needham 1980, 28), but its function in classifications, the classical legacy of "logical division" (Needham 1980, 42), is a Western mental product usually avoided in Japan and China. Americans favor dichotomies and exploit the differences of quality and extension between polar terms. Thus the American image (and concept) of *man* exaggerates the differences with *woman*. The common term for both, *mankind* or *human*, semantically is closer to man than to woman. The asymmetry of dimensions illustrated by the tilt of meaning toward man is typical of English and of American usage. The connotation of the dimension, *distance*, is closer to *far* than to its polar opposite, *near*; *quality* as a dimension is closer to its pole, *good*, than it is to the opposite, *bad*.

Similar semantic hints for understanding the conceptual structures of Japanese suggest less commitment to the dichotomy, to extremes, and a preference for the middle ground. *Otoko*, man, is semantically distinct from *onna*, woman; and words for humanity, *ninjin*, or *hito*, are semantically different. Traditionally, *ninjin* evoked *otoko*, man, reflecting the masculinity of Japanese culture, but semantically and conceptually the Japanese term accommodates both man and woman and common usage today refers to both impartially. The classification is relational rather than divisive as in English. A similar argument has been made for Chinese. For the dimension, again, of man-woman, the

Chinese select a middle position of an androgynous figure to represent the full dimension (Fisher 1972, 120).

Whether thinking is guided by dichotomized extremes, as in English, or relational prototypes, apparently as in Japanese, is a matter of considerable practical importance for communication between Americans and Japanese. Activities of planning, decision making, and negotiations are consistently troubled by the tensions between dichotomies and prototypes. In business, Americans approach management from the point of view of concepts such as decision making, planning, and skills, attempting to guide their actions according to an abstract one-dimensional criterion—of which practicality, efficiency, or profit are common choices. This style of thinking and acting is disturbing to Japanese, who guide their actions differently. In the back of their minds, Japanese businessmen are likely to have a prototype of a businessman who may be the president of a company or a historical figure. (Military men are often selected.) The prototype is the model, often in the form of sayings, which provide the direction for the businessmen.

The American dichotomy and Japanese prototype introduce the difficulty of using American meanings of abstract and concrete in Japanese society. The concept of prototype stresses integration and relation in a concrete, indivisible form. The prototype lies beyond the pale of the abstract-concrete distinction. Concrete in Japanese society has little to do with things and objects; it is better interpreted as availability of the proper person to carry out the appropriate action.

Reaching the last point about thinking, Japanese explanations rely on increasingly detailed descriptions of substance and actions. The consequences for intercultural communication occur daily. One American manager phrased the cross-cultural issue succinctly from the American side: "The Japanese managers do not answer 'why' questions." One example that he used to illustrate his observations involved the import of raw materials for the company's production at its plant near Tokyo. Shipments ordinarily arrived through Osaka, but on one occasion they came in through Yokohama. Customs inspection took two or three days longer than the company was accustomed to in Osaka. The American manager asked his Japanese colleague to go to the customs office and find out why the shipment had been delayed. The Japanese manager returned and gave the American detailed information on the inspection procedure. Somewhat annoyed the American requested the Japanese manager to return to customs, insisting that the delay for the first time was ok, but the central office had to know why it had happened and that it could not be repeated. The Japanese manager once more visited the customs, returning to the

American with more details about forms, customs officers, and time schedules. By now the American realized that the two men were confronting each other across a cultural barrier. He dropped the search for the answer to the question "why." Another Japanese manager in the same company reported that Japanese consider it immature to have to ask why: one should know.

The American and Japanese views of *why* contain profound implications for cultural orientations toward causation and determination. Americans believe in a prime mover, which becomes the monotheistic God in the field of religion. Causation assumes a similar role in science, although principles of indeterminacy in physics introduce probability, blunting the sharpness of unilateral determinism. Representative Americans in business, working in technology or in the professions, retain the cultural belief in a single cause. On the other hand, the Japanese reaction to *why* contains a commitment to "pluralistic indeterminism." Effects in the natural world can be described to be multiply determined if Westerners insist upon placing Japanese thought inside the iron cage of rationality.

#### BARRIERS IN VALUES

We referred to difficulties in thinking as blind spots, and with values we shall call them barriers. Values as the second component of mental formations shade off into thinking. The distinguishing quality of values is that they compose social reality and thereby provide criteria for judging actions. Values carry the judgmental or *optative* quality.

The values can be summarized in four clusters: activity, social relations, the world, and being (self concept). These four clusters are an expositional convenience and not a product of Western divisional logic. Social relations has been treated as the primordial datum. The core of the practical information we shall report was collected in interviews conducted in Tokyo in which a small sample of managers, half of them American and half Japanese, all working for the same multinational firm, were asked to identify the good and the bad aspects of working with the other nationality.

*Activity.* The value orientation of activity is a stable cultural difference with Americans oriented toward *doing*, or getting things done and attaining visible goals. This orientation is not so common as *being*, the dominant value of Mexican culture. With being, actions and behavior are guided to express and display the meaning, position, and personality of the individual. When compared to doing, being is closer to primordial identity. In Japanese society, the dominant value seems to be *being-in-becoming*. The individual is oriented toward improving

the proper place in society, conforming on the surface with rules and precedents, and receiving deference from others proportionate to status.

The different cultural orientation toward activity between Americans and Japanese shows up readily in activities prior to action such as decision making. The American position is conceptual and technical with various models available, consisting of three parts: decision maker, prediction systems, and criterion. In reaching a decision that maximizes desirable consequences according to a utility criterion such as profit, the decision maker learns to consider alternative courses of action and to select the most probable for maximizing the desired consequences (Stewart 1985, 177-211). Decision making is conflict and reaching the decision is a process of internal conflict resolution (Janis & Mann 1977, 45-80).

The Japanese counterpart to decision making is to enter current situations with the view of controlling and guiding them in directions favorable to their own interests. Their first concern is to gain the social support needed to carry out the action. Their cultural dispositions shape their moves as natural social events. Thus there is a reliance on rules and precedents which bring about the desired events and reduce uncertainty (Hofstede 1980, 165). If this process is forced into the iron cage of rationality, one would say that it is not a conceptual decision but a social judgment of feasibility that precipitates a course of action, the famous *nemawashi* process.

The barrier in decision making seems to be more on the American side. Japanese business companies are quite conscious of the human relations core of their management process. Developing a course of action takes place behind the scenes. What Westerners see as the decision making session is a public showing of unity, consisting of those who support the course of action plus those who have decided not to object.

*Social relations.* Japanese social relations are the basic datum of the culture and become the basis on which groups are formed. There is an expectation that the group will last indefinitely and therefore the members are selected for their potential ability to adapt to other members and their capacity to bring to the group appropriate power in the form of their access to key members of critical networks. From the American point of view, they often seem to lack appropriate specialists. Americans are blind to the hierarchical nature of Japanese society, prodding each Japanese incessantly to rank himself with his peers on the basis of superiority. The ruthless competition which can erupt when two individuals appear to be exactly equal indicates the necessity



of paying attention to human relations and establishing rules of seniority, promotion, and protocol, which contain and conceal the competition, turning it to the advantage of the group. The Japanese labyrinth of comparing and competing is not understood by the Westerner, although it should give a clue to explain from this view the reasonable Japanese preoccupation with human relations and its use as the base of group formation. The primary function of the Japanese group is to serve as the social grounds for individuals to establish their identities and securities in preparation for the contests which lie ahead. In the course of the process, the Japanese also develop strong bonds and cooperate, but this is more a result of a congenial mix of attributes of members than the effects of group cooperation in the Western sense (Nakane 1970, 1-23). Neither the concept of group nor social relations pass Japanese cultural inspection.

The Japanese do not usually understand the American cultural way with social relations any more than the Americans understand the Japanese. The barrier seems to be reciprocal. From the American point of view, there is the almost impossible situation of attempting to adjust to the thick web of Japanese human relations, while the Japanese see the American as aggressive and insensitive. Americans working in Japanese groups usually become embittered, feeling that they are never fully accepted nor included in the inner sanctum of decision making. The Japanese do not work well in Western groups nor Westerners in Japanese groups. Cross-cultural adaptation in social relations remains a difficult goal to achieve.

*The world.* The basic value under this category is the relationship between humanity and the world. There are three possibilities: control, integration, subjugation. Americans prefer control while the Japanese lean toward integration. The third alternative, subjugation, permeates the Arabic world.

Americans accept the world at their disposal and are fully prepared to exploit it to satisfy their economic and material needs. But beyond these needs, an American sporting spirit and fascination for material control cultivate commitment to technology. Although the Japanese use and expertly construct technology, their commitment is more on the surface than the American's. In the work place, Americans are more likely to rely on technical skills and hardware for safety and efficiency while the Japanese, fully exploiting technology, nevertheless pit their well-being against concentrated consciousness, *kokoro gake*. They are disposed toward sensory experience such as the cold of winter and the heat of summer and toward confronting the world directly, unencumbered with technical tools or weapons, relying on trained

endurance and mental discipline gained through traditional practices such as the martial arts or tea ceremony. The contrasting American and Japanese orientations produce complementary barriers. In the field of management of technology, a major stumbling block is the American development and use of the mental formation of negative reasoning.

In negative reasoning, the American use of the value of lineal time appears in the predictive system of decision making. Americans learn to use lineal time predictions at an early age when they are trained to anticipate consequences to their acts—the why question again—and to select the course of action which seems will produce the most desirable consequences. Also from an early age, Americans learn to weigh negative factors against positive ones. Much of American action is avoiding pitfalls and specific obstacles on the path leading to a positive goal. The culture through the roles of parents, teachers, and superiors encourages the individual to observe restrictions and taboos, but it preserves silence on what the individual should do in a positive direction. This pattern of specifying the negative features endures as a cultural characteristic in problem solving. Technically known as negative reasoning, the approach appears naturally in technology in the form of efficiency and safety. Technical processes and products are naturally analyzed and tested from the point of view of what can go wrong. The extreme case is the worst case analysis.

None of the values of lineal time, devisional analysis into positive and negative features, and focus on avoidance enjoy dominance in Japanese culture. Thus American negative reasoning appears critical and disturbing to Japanese. In technology, the advantages of negative reasoning are accepted and practiced in the seclusion of quality control circles, among other places.

*Identity of being (self concept).* In societies where belonging is the essence of being, the individual is securely locked into a status in society. Identity resembles what has been called a role-personality, implying that the self-concept incorporates social parts of the culture and society (Lebra 1976, 250). Under their cultural circumstances, questions of identity tend to arise only when Japanese interact with Westerners, whose being is constructed on the basis of identity rather than belonging. The human dilemma in Japan is occupying one's proper place (Lebra 1976, 67-89), and the identity of the individual, in a general sense, is determined by the primordial sentiments. In the West, and particularly in the United States, the social network within which members of the society lead their lives is not so thick.

In contrast to the Japanese role-personality, Americans exhibit the concept of individualism. The difference remains among the most

obstinate barriers to cross-cultural cooperation. When meeting someone for the first time, the American looks at the name on the calling card and then tries to connect it with the organization. The Japanese looks at the organization, assesses the individual's position within it, and determines his own position relative to the other on steps of a hierarchy. Within the multicultural office, the Japanese consider the secretary near the manager to be their secretary but the American considers the secretary to be the manager's. American choices are made on the basis of career plans, expecting that personal decision will mesh with the goals of the company. The Japanese carefully calibrate and conceal competitiveness within the network of relationships, acting for the good of the group, and do not draw undue attention to the individual responsible for decisions and actions, expecting the results to reflect on all. In Japan, displays of power tend to decrease the ability to wield it.

The nature of the identity in each culture deeply affects all aspects of thinking, feeling, and behaving, introducing tension into many interactions. Yet, in its own way, each kind of identity has its distinctive merits.

#### CONCLUSION

The experience of human suffering associated with the impermanence of life, the inequality among people, and the ubiquity of death and destruction creates primal anxiety. Counter to this experience, all people accept the sacredness of life. But this universal value does not appease primal anxiety since sacredness of life founders on impermanence, and it does not extend equally to all—members of the family are more highly valued than members of distant groups. To contain primal anxiety, all human groupings cultivate religion in the form of communication through rites, rituals, customs, and ceremonies.

Participation in religious actions builds human solidarity, forming communities bound together by social actualities of religion, language, race, ethnicity, customs and traditions, and region. These native social actualities seem natural and normal, and they engender primordial sentiments that provide the base for belonging and for social identity. These social sources of being are diffuse, with identity relying more on participation in daily life than on belief. Most people are chiefly concerned with justice in their own concrete situations and are attentive to personal and immediately present authorities. For most of the time, the social, political, and sacred values of the society are suspended under the distraction of specific tasks. The social sources of identity and of religion are opaque for most Westerners, who expect the sense of being to arise from individualism and religion to be transcendental as in the

nature of Christianity. But social scientists have stressed that all religions are an idealization of social relations.

An explanation of self-identity leads to an analysis of the psychological functions which provide internalized control mechanisms for guiding and controlling behavior. These can be treated as mental formations of deep culture of members of a society. These mental formations were explained as thinking and values. The category of values was subdivided into activity, social relations, the world, and the self. For purposes of a graphic exposition, mental formations were selected that have created blind spots in thinking and barriers in values for communication between Americans and Japanese.

The sacredness of life, driven by primal anxiety, takes refuge in human relations governed by the primordial sentiments. This diffuse belonging and social identity forms self-identity in the cultural processes of thinking and valuing.

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