Edward Evans-Pritchard

Mary Douglas: Collected Works

Volume VII

MARY DOUGLAS

MARY DOUGLAS: COLLECTED WORKS

VOLUME I
The Lele of the Kasai

VOLUME II
Purity and Danger

VOLUME III
Natural Symbols

VOLUME IV
Rules and Meanings

VOLUME V
Implicit Meanings

VOLUME VI
The World of Goods

VOLUME VII
Edward Evans-Pritchard

VOLUME VIII
Essays in the Sociology of Perception

VOLUME IX
Food in the Social Order

VOLUME X
Constructive Drinking

VOLUME XI
Risk Acceptability According to the Social Sciences

VOLUME XII
Risk and Blame

MARY DOUGLAS
COLLECTED WORKS

VOLUME VII

EDWARD EVANS-PRITCHARD

London and New York

First published in 1980 by The Viking Press

This edition published 2003
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

First issued in paperback 2010

© Mary Douglas 1980

Typeset in Times by
Keystroke, Jacaranda Lodge, Wolverhampton

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

ISBN 978-0-415-29110-1 (hbk) (Volume VII)
ISBN 978-0-415-60659-2 (pbk) (Volume VII)
ISBN 978-0-415-28397-7 (set)
ISBN13: 978-1-134-55715-8 (ebk)

Publisher's Note
The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original may be apparent

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the Russell Sage Foundation, New York, in whose employ I am, for allowing me time and resources for writing this book. Clearly it is a personal view. I am grateful to Christopher Ricks for criticizing that view. I thank Robert Merton for guidance on the development of the sociology of knowledge; Thomas Luckmann, P. Viazzo, and Jeffrey Stout for discussion of *Nuer Religion;* Thomas Kuhn for correcting the account of feedback. T. O. Beidelman's *Bibliography of the Writings of E. E. Evans-Pritchard* (1974) has been invaluable. I am grateful to Denis Hynes for help with the short bibliography and to Madeline Spitaleri for producing the finished manuscript.

CONTENTS

	Acknowledgments	v
	Biographical Note	ix
i /	Introduction	1
ii /	Human Mental Faculties	6
iii /	The Continuity of Evans-Pritchard's Program	23
iv /	Fieldwork Methods	35
v /	Accountability among the Azande	46
vi /	Accountability among the Nuer	61
vii /	Reasoning and Memory	75
viii /	*Nuer Religion*	91
ix /	Contradiction	114
x /	Evans-Pritchard's Contemporary Influence	125
	Short Bibliography	137
	Index	145

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

1902	Born on September 21 at Crowborough, Sussex; son of the Reverend John Evans-Pritchard (Church of England) and the former Dorothea Edwards.
1916–24	Educated at Winchester College and Exeter College, Oxford, where he took an M.A. in Modern History.
1923–27	Graduate studies at the London School of Economics under B. Malinowski and C. G. Seligman.
1926–30	Fieldtrips among the Azande.
1928–31	Lecturer in Anthropology at the London School of Economics.
1930	Begins research among the Nuer.
1932	Professor of Sociology at Fuad I University (now the Egyptian University of Cairo).
1935–40	Lecturer in African Sociology at Oxford.
1939	Marries Ioma Gladys Heaton Nicholls, by whom he had three sons and two daughters.

1940–45	Military service in Ethiopia, the Sudan, and Syria.
1944	Enters Roman Catholic Church.
1945–46	Reader in Anthropology at Cambridge.
1946–70	Professor of Social Anthropology and Fellow of All Souls College at Oxford. Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago, 1950; Fellow at Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, 1957–58.
1970	Retires from Chair at Oxford.
1973	Dies on September 11, in Oxford.

EDWARD EVANS-PRITCHARD

Introduction

I

"I should make it clear at this point that I am not, and never have been clever; imaginative and industrious if you like, but not clever in a bookish way of speaking. . . ."[1] So Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard in his old age described his own talents, knowing that he had achieved a resounding reputation in anthropology. The object of this book is to explain to readers unacquainted with this field what he did and why his thought is significant for the contemporary world of letters. He was a highly independent thinker who made signal advances in many branches of anthropology. His standing as a master of modern thought rests upon his solitary confronting, in the 1930s, of intellectual dilemmas that are crowding in heavily upon the social sciences forty years later.

[1] "Genesis of a Social Anthropologist," p. 18.

It is only right to say that this is not a straight summary and something different from a synthesis. I have made a personal reconstruction upon the writings, forcing them into closer confrontation with problems that were evidently present to Evans-Pritchard but which have become more public and explicit since. There was no need to go beyond Evans-Pritchard to explain the importance of his work to specialists. The challenge here is to interest others in solutions to problems they have never considered. While I was pondering how to focus on the challenge, I realized that a name for his method was missing. A name is a powerful concentrator of ideas. By naming a theory of social accountability, I can show more cogently the methodological advances that can be built only upon his work. Thus his own intention of relating moral philosophy and religion systematically with social behavior would be better fulfilled. The reader will have no difficulty, I hope, in distinguishing the master's original work from the pupil's presentation.

One of the present crises in sociology comes from the criticisms of phenomenologists. Maintaining that social understanding must start from the human experience of consciousness and reflection, they despair of truth in any so-called humane science that ignores the distinctively human element. These critics have undermined confidence in the traditional methods and even in the traditional objectives of sociology. Consequently, many scholars sensitive to the criticism have been tempted to give up striving for objectivity and to shift their own writing into a mystical mode, indulgent to their own subjectivity. Others, who would still like to try for objective comparisons, find little alternative but to work on in the old framework of inquiry, and so tend to shirk these issues. In advance of this critical juncture Evans-Pritchard felt the dilemma keenly. He would not subscribe to mechanistic social the-

ories and resisted scientistic fashions in anthropology. His own rugged individualism forbade him to ignore individual human agency, and he found uncongenial any theorizing that reduced the mind to a mere arena in which social factors contend. It would go against his private philosophy to diminish persons in their autonomous personhood, even as objects of research, still more as objects of social engineering. But he did not abandon the wish for objective comparison. So in his own work he met the problems that now beset us all more generally. He taught that the essential point for comparison is that at which people meet misfortune. They may accuse others, they may accept responsibility. They count different kinds of misfortune as needing explanation. As they work their ideas of blame and compensation into their social institutions, they invoke existences and powers that are adapted to each particular accounting system. There are ways of getting valid evidence on these essential moral purposes as they surface from consciousness into action.

The simplest formula in which to sum up these methods and the assumptions they rest upon is tracing accountability. This book will argue that Evans-Pritchard's method of tracing notions of accountability through their institutional forms, because it starts with moral agents and their ideas about morality, shows a way out of the current difficulties in sociology. By tracing penalties and moral confrontations, a method of selecting and recording evidence emerges. The effort to classify kinds of accountability in different social systems requires a careful sifting of information. The method carries its own internal-audit system. Theoretically, payments of debt and executions of justice, when they cover the whole of social life, should tally. If they do not, there is something more to research and explain. One of the strengths of the method is that it rests on the assumption that human so-

ciety is composed not of ciphers but of active agencies endowed with intelligence and will. Intentions create and sustain institutions as much as institutions constrain intentions. Starting from here, the analysis opens up questions not entertained in traditional sociology.

Another feature of his modernity is Evans-Pritchard's anticipation of the sociology of everyday knowledge. It has been respectable to research into the history of ideas and the sociology of knowledge since the nineteenth century. But these subjects have been venerably dressed in capital letters, as it were, and only recently has the artificial compartmentalizing of different branches of knowledge been criticized. The phenomenological writings of Husserl and Schutz have provoked a move to develop a systematic sociology of the commonsense knowledge of ordinary people in everyday contexts. Evans-Pritchard's specialized problem in anthropology led him early to that development because he could not deal with magic and totemism in specialized compartments. Futhermore, he extraordinarily anticipated the intentions of everyday-language philosophers by his recognition of the need to interpret speech fully in its context of functioning social relations and especially, of course, in social accounting.

Another way in which Evans-Pritchard was in advance of his time may be no more than a curious byway of history: but he did analyze a negative-feedback system in 1940. As the final abstraction from social reality, system was frequently alluded to in earlier anthropological writings. Largely using neurological models as metaphors, the references were very inexact. After Norbert Wiener worked out the principles of a feedback in his *Cybernetics* (1948), it became a fashionable word, but it was generally used in a partial sense to illustrate the counteractive influence of different tendencies upon each other, without defining the limits of the system nor ex-