THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO DURKHEIM

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ROBERT N. BELLAH

Durkheim and ritual

Although this chapter will begin with Émile Durkheim's ([1912] 1995) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (Elementary Forms)*, I will focus on the place of ritual in the Durkheimian tradition, rather than add to the already enormous amount of explication of that book and the place of ritual in it.[1] Even so, because of the vast influence of Durkheim on several disciplines, my treatment will be highly selective. I will focus on the ways in which ritual continues to be central for the understanding not only of religion, but of society.

There is probably no better place to begin a discussion of the place of ritual in the thought of Émile Durkheim than with a famous passage in his *Elementary Forms*:

> Life in Australian [Aboriginal] societies alternates between two different phases. In one phase, the population is scattered in small groups that attend to their occupations independently. Each family lives to itself, hunting, fishing – in short, striving by all possible means to get the food it requires. In the other phase, by contrast, the population comes together, concentrating itself at specified places for a period that varies from several days to several months. This concentration takes place when a clan or a portion of the tribe . . . conducts a religious ceremony.
>
> These two phases stand in the sharpest possible contrast. The first phase, in which economic activity predominates, is generally of rather low intensity. Gathering seeds or plants necessary for food, hunting, and fishing are not occupations that can stir truly strong passions. The dispersed state in which the society finds itself makes life monotonous, slack, and humdrum. Everything changes when a [ceremony] takes place . . . Once the individuals are gathered together a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness and quickly launches them into an extraordinary height of exaltation . . . Probably because a collective emotion cannot be expressed collectively without some order that permits harmony and unison of movement, [their] gestures and cries tend to fall into rhythm and regularity, and from there into songs and dances . . .
>
> (Durkheim [1912] 1995: 216–18)

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Thus Durkheim makes his critical distinction between profane time, which is "monotonous, slack and humdrum," and sacred time, which he characterizes as "collective effervescence." Sacred time is devoted primarily to ritual. Further, the community that ritual creates is at the center of Durkheim's definition of religion: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim [1912] 1995: 44).[2]

Although Durkheim speaks of "beliefs and practices" and organizes his work in three books, the first introductory, the second and much the longest on beliefs, and the third on ritual practices, it would not be right to assume that Durkheim privileges beliefs over practices. We learn from what is perhaps the key chapter of the whole book, book II, chapter 5, entitled "Origin of These Beliefs," that ritual is prior to belief and gives rise to it:

> Collective representations . . . presuppose that consciousnesses are acting and reacting on each other; they result from actions and reactions that are possible only with the help of tangible intermediaries. Thus the function of the intermediaries is not merely to reveal the mental state associated with them; they also contribute to its making. The individual minds can meet and commune only if they come outside themselves, but they do this only by means of movement. It is the homogeneity of these movements that makes the group aware of itself and that, in consequence, makes it be. Once this homogeneity has been established and these movements have taken a definite form and been stereotyped, they serve to symbolize the corresponding representations. But these movements symbolize those representations only because they have helped to form them.
>
> (Durkheim [1912] 1995: 232)[3]

Collective representations – beliefs – are essential in the process through which society becomes aware of itself, but they arise from and express the homogeneous physical movements that constitute the ritual, not the other way around. Thus Durkheim does not authorize a "symbolic interpretation" of ritual that attempts to read off symbolic meaning from observed events. Rather he would interpret the "emblems," as he calls them, the bullroarers or other ritual implements engraved with abstract totemic designs, in terms of the ritual actions within which they are used. Meaning arises from this totality, not as an interpretation of it.

Mary Douglas, whose work will be discussed further below, offers the idea of the exemplar as a way of avoiding the distinction between the real and the symbolic. She cites Godfrey Lienhardt's work on Dinka ritual as "a model of cognition based on repeated enactment of exemplars," which does not point beyond itself "symbolically":

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> A Dinka rite mimes a wish, the miming articulates an intention. The community that has killed and eaten together the sacrificial ox has enacted some of its complex intentions about itself. It would be absurd to say that their ritual has represented a communion meal, when they have just eaten one. Their wish for community to be possessed by divinity is realized (not represented) in the trance of their priests whom the spirit does possess. The quivering flesh of the dying victim is not symbolizing something other than itself, it is an example of the same quivering in the flesh of the person in trance. The community is not depicting something but giving itself a sample of its idea of true community. Against this sample it measures its own achievement of the ideal. The sacrifice is a self-referencing enactment. In structuring the community's self-perception it structures its future behavior: as Goodman says, the version of the world that has been adopted itself affects the world. (Douglas 1992: 249–51)[4]

Thus with respect to the Durkheimian understanding of ritual it is social enactment that is primary. A world of symbolic meanings can and does arise from such enactments, a world with many implications for the rest of social life, but the ritual enactment retains its primacy and cannot be reduced to the symbols that derive from it.

Since ritual, for Durkheim, is primarily about the sacred in a sense in which the religious and the social are almost interchangeable, subsequent work on ritual under his influence has not moved far beyond him by placing ritual at the core of any kind of social interaction whatsoever. While on the one hand this might be seen as broadening the idea of ritual to include "secular ritual," the same development might be seen as disclosing an element of the sacred, and thus of the religious, at the very basis of social action of any kind. Recent work of Randall Collins represents this development most clearly. In *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (1998), Collins combines Durkheim and Goffman to define the basic social event as, in Goffman's (1967) phrase, an interaction ritual.[5] At the most fundamental level interaction rituals involve:

1. a group of at least two people physically assembled;
2. who focus attention on the same object or action, and each becomes aware that the other is maintaining this focus;
3. who share a common mood or emotion.

In this process of ritual interaction the members of the group, through their shared experience, feel a sense of membership, however fleeting, with a sense of boundary between those sharing the experience and all those outside it; they feel some sense of moral obligation to each other, which is symbolized by whatever they focused on during the interaction; and, finally, they are charged with what Collins calls emotional energy but which he identifies

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with what Durkheim called moral force. Since, according to Collins (1998: 22–4), all of social life consists of strings of such ritual interactions, then ritual becomes the most fundamental category for the understanding of social action. Collins then makes another move that has, I believe, the greatest significance:

> Language itself is the product of a pervasive natural ritual. The rudimentary act of speaking involves the ingredients listed at the outset of this chapter: group assembly, mutual focus, common sentiment; as a result, words are collective representations, loaded with moral significance. (Collins 1998: 47)

Ritual and the origin of language

This observation of Collins, in turn, suggests a digression into the present evolutionary understanding of the origin of language. The origin of language was for long a taboo subject because it opened the door to unrestrained speculation. The question remains and probably will always remain, speculative, but advances in neurophysiology on the one hand and Paleolithic archeology on the other have opened the door to much more disciplined forms of speculation such as that of Terrence Deacon in his book *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain* (1997). Deacon is a biological anthropologist and neuroscientist and is trying to understand the emergence of language among our ancestral hominids whose brains were not organized for language use, although, as we know, our nearest primate relatives can, with the most enormous effort and external training, be taught at least a rudimentary use of words. But, as Deacon puts it, "The first hominids to use symbolic communication were entirely on their own, with very little in the way of external supports. How then, could they have succeeded with their chimpanzee-like brains in achieving this difficult result? . . . In a word, the answer is ritual" (1997: 402).

Deacon makes the case for the parallel between teaching symbolic communication to chimpanzees and the origin of language in ritual as follows:

> Indeed, ritual is still a central component of symbolic "education" in modern societies, though we are seldom aware of its modern role because of the subtle way it is woven into the fabric of society. The problem for symbolic discovery is to shift attention from the concrete to the abstract; from separate indexical links between signs and objects to an organized set of relations between signs. In order to bring the logic of [sign–sign] relations to the fore, a high degree of redundancy is important. This was demonstrated in the experiments with the chimpanzees . . . It was found that getting them to repeat by rote a large number of errorless trials in combining lexigrams enabled them to make the transition

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> from explicit and concrete sign–object associations to implicit sign–sign associations. Repetition of the same set of actions with the same set of objects over and over again in a ritual performance is often used for a similar purpose in modern human societies. Repetition can render the individual details of some performance automatic and minimally conscious, while at the same time the emotional intensity induced by group participation can help focus attention on other aspects of the object and actions involved. In a ritual frenzy, one can be induced to see everyday activities and objects in a very different light.
>
> (Deacon 1997: 402–3)[6]

But if repetition and redundancy are always, as we shall see, important in ritual, what was the evolutionary push that made the transition from indexical to symbolic signs essential, and therefore the ritual mechanism so indispensable? Deacon describes the situation at the period of this critical transition:

> The near synchrony in human prehistory of the first increase of brain size, the first appearance of stone tools for hunting and butchery, and a considerable reduction in sexual dimorphism is not a coincidence. These changes are interdependent. All are symptoms of a fundamental restructuring of the hominid adaptation, which resulted in a significant change in feeding ecology, a radical change in social structure, and an unprecedented (indeed, revolutionary) change in representational abilities. The very first symbols ever thought, or acted out, or uttered on the face of the earth grew out of this socio-ecological dilemma, and so they may not have been very much like speech. They also probably required considerable complexity of social organization to bring the unprepared brains of these apes to comprehend fully what they meant . . . Symbolic culture was a response to a reproductive problem that only symbols could solve: the imperative of representing a social contract.
>
> (Deacon 1997: 401)

Ritual is common in the animal world, including among the primates. But non-human ritual is always indexical, not symbolic; that is, it points to present realities, not to future contingencies. The primary focus of animal ritual is on issues of great importance and uncertainty: sex and aggression. Through ritual actions animals represent to each other their readiness or unreadiness for sexual contact or for combat. Through the ritual "dance" an unwilling partner may be "persuaded" to engage in sexual intercourse, or an originally combative opponent may be persuaded to offer signs of submission. Such ritual behaviors help to make possible these inherently difficult transactions.

The "reproductive problem" to which Deacon suggests symbolism was the solution, however, required more than assuring a present response; it required assurance of future actions – it required promises. At the point

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where efficient adaptation to the environment made cross-gender pair bonding necessary, with its division of labor between the provision of meat and care of infants, the stability of what was now necessarily "marriage" required more than non-symbolic ritual:

> Sexual or mating displays are incapable of referring to what might be, or should be. This information can only be given expression symbolically. The pair bonding in the human lineage is essentially a promise, or rather a set of promises that must be made public. These not only determine what behaviors are probable in the future, but more important, they implicitly determine which future behaviors are allowed and not allowed; that is, which are defined as cheating and may result in retaliation. (Deacon 1997: 399)

Another advantage of symbolic ritual as against purely non-human animal ritual is that it gives rise not to ad hoc relationships, but to a whole system of relationships:

> Ritualized support is also essential to ensure that all members of the group understand the newly established contract and will behave accordingly. As in peacemaking, demonstrating that these relationships exist and providing some way of marking them for future reference so that they can be invoked and enforced demand the explicit presentation of supportive indices, not just from reproductive partners but from all significant kin and group members . . .
>
> Marriage and puberty rituals serve this function in most human societies . . . The symbol construction that occurs in these ceremonies is not just a matter of demonstrating certain symbolic relationships, but actually involves the use of individuals and actions as symbol tokens. Social roles are redefined and individuals are explicitly assigned to them. A wife, a husband, a warrior, a father-in-law, an elder – all are symbolic roles, not reproductive roles, and as such are defined with respect to a complete system of alternative or complementary symbolic roles. Unlike social status in other species, which is a more-or-less relationship in potential flux, symbolic status is categorical. As with all symbolic relationships, social roles are defined in the context of a logically complete system of potential transformations; and because of this, all members of a social group (as well as any potential others from the outside) are assigned an implicit symbolic relationship when any one member changes status. (Deacon 1997: 406)[7]

And Deacon points out that, over the last million years, although language undoubtedly developed toward more self-sufficient vocal symbol systems, whose very power was the degree to which they could become context-free, nonetheless, "symbols are still extensively tied to ritual-like cultural practices and paraphernalia. Though speech is capable of conveying many forms of information independent of any objective supports, in practice there are

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often extensive physical and social contextual supports that affect what is communicated" (1997: 407).

Deacon's argument runs remarkably parallel to that of Goffman, Collins, and of course Durkheim. The point is that symbolism (including centrally language), social solidarity based on a moral order, and individual motivation to conform, all depend on ritual. But Deacon, as we have seen, has indicated that the very first emergence of symbolism "may not have been very much like speech." There is reason to believe that full linguisticality, language as, with all its diversity, all known human cultures have had it, is relatively recent, perhaps no older than the species *Homo sapiens sapiens*, that is 120,000 years old (Nichols 1998). But symbol-using hominids have been around for at least a million years. Can we say anything about what kind of proto-language such hominids might have used? Perhaps we can in a way that will further illuminate the nature of ritual.

Ritual and the origin of music

While in the last decade or two a number of valuable books concerned with the origins of language have been published, it was not until the year 2000 that an important volume entitled *The Origins of Music* appeared. A number of articles in this edited volume by Wallin, Merker, and Brown begin to indicate what the "ritual" that Deacon suggests provided the context for the origin of language might have been like: namely, it involved music. The ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettle, in discussing features of music found in all cultures, writes: "It is important to consider also certain universals that do not involve musical sound or style. I mentioned the importance of music in ritual, and, as it were, in addressing the supernatural. This seems to me to be truly a universal, shared by all known societies, however different the sound" (2000: 468). He draws from this the conclusion that the "earliest human music was somehow associated with ritual" (Nettle 2000: 472). But "music" in most cultures involves more than what can simply be heard, as our current usage of the word implies. As Walter Freeman puts it, "Music involves not just the auditory system but the somatosensory and motor systems as well, reflecting its strong associations with dance, the rhythmic tapping, stepping, clapping, and chanting that accompany and indeed produce music" (2000: 412). And Ellen Dissanayake writes, "I suggest that in their origins, movement and music were inseparable, as they are today in premodern societies and in children . . . I consider it essential that we incorporate movement (or kinesics) with song as integral to our thinking about the evolutionary origin of music" (2000: 397).

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While the contributors to *The Origins of Music* are not of one mind about the social function of music that gave it its evolutionary value, several of them emphasize the role of music in the creation of social solidarity. As Freeman puts it, "Here [in music] in its purest form is a human technology for crossing the solipsistic gulf. It is wordless [not necessarily, R. B.], illogical, deeply emotional, and selfless in its actualization of transient and then lasting harmony between individuals . . . It constructs the sense of trust and predictability in each member of the community on which social interactions are based" (2000: 420). Dissanayake, who locates music fundamentally in the mother–infant relationship in the human species with its much longer period of infant dependence on adult care, compared to any other species, writes:

> I suggest that the biologically endowed sensitivities and competencies of mother–infant interaction were found by evolving human groups to be emotionally affecting and functionally effective when used and when further shaped and elaborated in culturally created ceremonial rituals where they served a similar purpose – to attune or synchronize, emotionally conjoin, and enculturate the participants. These unifying and pleasurable features (maintained in children's play) made up a sort of behavioral reservoir from which human cultures could appropriate appealing and compelling components for communal ceremonial rituals that similarly promoted affiliation and congruence in adult social life. (Dissanayake 2000: 401)

Finally Freeman, unlike Deacon, brings us back to Durkheim when he quotes a passage from *Elementary Forms*:

> Émile Durkheim described the socializing process as the use of ". . . totemic emblems by clans to express and communicate collective representations," which begins where the individual feels he *is* the totem and evolves beliefs that he will become the totem or that his ancestors are in the totem. Religious rites and ceremonies lead to "collective mental states of extreme emotional intensity, in which representation is still undifferentiated from the movements and actions which make the communion toward which it tends a reality to the group. Their participation in it is *so effectively lived* that it is not yet properly imagined." (Freeman 2000: 419)

Dissanayake emphasizes the socializing and enculturating aspects of the quasi-ritual interactions between mother and infant, interactions that actually create the psychological, social and cultural capacity of children to become full participants in society. While we might think of these "socializing" or even "normalizing" functions of ritual as Durkheimian, we should not forget that Durkheim believed that through experiences of collective effervescence, not only was society reaffirmed, but new, sometimes

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radically new, social innovations were made possible. Freeman puts this insight into the language of contemporary neurobiology:

> I conclude that music and dance originated through biological evolution of brain chemistry, which interacted with the cultural evolution of behavior. This led to the development of chemical and behavioral technology for inducing altered states of consciousness. The role of trance states was particularly important for breaking down preexisting habit and beliefs. That meltdown appears to be necessary for personality changes leading to the formation of social groups by cooperative action leading to trust. Bonding is not simply a release of a neurochemical in an altered state. It is the social action of dancing and singing together that induces new forms of behavior, owing to the malleability that can come through the altered state. It is reasonable to suppose that musical skills played a major role early in the evolution of human intellect, because they made possible formation of human societies as a prerequisite for the transmission of acquired knowledge across generations. (Freeman 2000: 422)

Having seen how much light this new work on the origins of music has shed on questions of the place of ritual in human evolution, let us finally return to the question raised by Deacon about the fact that early symbol use "may not have been very much like speech," but was probably some kind of proto-language. Steven Brown (2000) starts from the point that, though language and music today are clearly different in that their primary locations in the brain are different, nonetheless, even in terms of brain physiology, there is a great deal of overlap between them. He then suggests that language and music form a continuum rather than an absolute dichotomy, with language in the sense of sound as referential meaning at one end, and music in the sense of sound as emotive meaning at the other. What is interesting is the range of things in between, with verbal song at the mid-point (verbal song is the commonest form of music worldwide). Moving toward language as referential meaning from the mid-point we have poetic discourse, *recitativo*, and heightened speech. Moving toward music as emotive meaning from the mid-point we have "word painting," *Leitmotifs*, and musical narration (Brown 2000: 275). From this existing continuum, from features of their overlapping location in brain physiology, and from parsimony in explanation, Brown argues that rather than music and language evolving separately, or emerging one from the other, the likeliest account is that both developed from something that was simultaneously proto-language and proto-music and that he calls "musilanguage" (2000: 277). If we postulate that musilanguage was also enacted, that is, involved meaningful gesture as well as sound, then we can see ritual as a primary evolutionary example of musilanguage and note that even today ritual is apt to be a kind of musilanguage: however

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sophisticated its verbal, musical, and gestural components have become, they are still deeply implicated with each other.

The nature of ritual

Having considered the roots of ritual and its most fundamental human functions, we will now consider somewhat more closely the basic features of ritual. The most important book on ritual in recent years is Roy Rappaport's *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (1999),[8] a book immersed in the Durkheimian anthropological tradition. Rappaport's first, and highly condensed, definition of ritual is "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers" (1999: 24). Rappaport's stress on "invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances" brings us back to features of musilanguage that may have been essential in the transformation of meaningless sound sequences into highly condensed, in the sense of undifferentiated, but still referentially/emotively meaningful, sound events. A key aspect of these transitional events is redundancy, essential in helping humans move from indexical to symbolic meaning. According to Bruce Richman, musical redundancy is communicated in three forms: (1) repetition, (2) formulaicness, that is "the storehouse of preexisting formulas, riffs, themes, motifs and rhythms," and (3) expectancy "of exactly what is going to come next and fill the upcoming temporal slot" (2000: 304). In the redundancy created by expectancy, the most important element is tempo, the rhythm that may be created by drumming, the stamping of feet, or other means. It is noteworthy that humans are the only primates with the ability to keep time to an external timekeeper, such as the beating of a drum (Brown, Merker, and Wallin 2000: 12). This ability to "keep together in time" (McNeill 1995) is probably one of several biological developments that have evolved synchronously with the development of culture, but one of great importance for the ritual roots of society.[9] In any case it is closely related to the "more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances" that are central to Rappaport's definition of ritual.

From his very condensed original definition of ritual Rappaport draws implications, which he spends the rest of a rather long book developing. For our purposes, the most important implications have to do with the creation of social conventions, a moral order, a sense of the sacred, and a relationship to the cosmos, including beliefs about what lies behind the empirical cosmos (1999: 27). Rappaport, like most other writers on ritual, is aware of the wide variety of actions that can be classified under this term. One defining feature of ritual for him is performance (1999: 37). In his usage

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of this potentially ambiguous term, performance carries the sense of what is called in the philosophy of language performative speech: something is not simply described or symbolized, but done, enacted. This gets back to Deacon's point about promises or Freeman's emphasis on trust. The sheer act of participating in serious rituals entails a commitment with respect to future action, at the very least solidarity with one's fellow communicants. Thus, as Rappaport uses the term, it would explicitly not be the same as participating in a dramatic "performance," where the actor sheds the "role" as soon as the performance is over, and the audience, however moved, goes away knowing it was "only a play."[10] On the contrary, serious ritual performance has the capacity to transform not only the role but the personality of the participant, as in rites of passage (van Gennep [1908] 1960). The fundamental relationship between saying and doing Rappaport sees as establishing "convention in ritual" and the "social contract and morality that inhere in it." This is the ground, he argues, for "taking ritual to be humanity's basic social act" (Rappaport 1999: 107).

Talal Asad (1993) in an important critique of anthropological theories of ritual as "symbolic action," that is, action whose meaning can simply be read off by the anthropological observer, emphasizes instead the older Christian meaning of ritual as discipline. In this he would seem, in part, to be paralleling Rappaport's distinction between dramatic performance, which is expressive of meaning but has no moral consequence, and ritual as performative in the sense of a fundamental change of disposition on the part of the participant. Asad writes:

> [T]he idea of the sacraments as metaphorical representations inhabits an entirely different world from the one that gives sense to Hugh of St. Victor's theology: "Sacraments," he stated, "are known to have been instituted for three reasons: on account of humiliation, on account of instruction, on account of exercise." According to this latter conception, the sacraments are not the representation of cultural metaphors; they are parts of a Christian program for creating in its performers, by means of regulated practice, the "mental and moral dispositions" appropriate to Christians. (Asad 1993: 78)

It is precisely the element of discipline or external constraint that Radcliffe-Brown, as quoted by Rappaport, sees in the ritual dances of the Andaman Islanders:

> The Andaman dance, then, is a complete activity of the whole community in which every able-bodied adult takes part, and is also an activity to which, so far as the dancer is concerned, the whole personality is involved, by the intervention of all the muscles of the body, by the concentration of attention required, and by its action on the personal sentiments. In the dance the individual submits

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> to the action upon him of the community; he is constrained by the immediate effect of rhythm, as well as by custom, to join in, and he is required to conform in his own actions and movements to the needs of the common activity. The surrender of the individual to this constraint or obligation is not felt as painful, but on the contrary as highly pleasurable.
>
> (Rappaport 1999: 221, quoting A. R. Radcliffe-Brown [1922] 1964: 251–2)[11]

Although ritual is deeply involved with what Marcel Mauss ([1935] 1973: 70–88) called "techniques of the body," it also at the same time involves a complex set of meanings, which cannot simply be read off from the ritual but must be understood in the context of the whole form of life of the ritual participants. One of Rappaport's most interesting ideas is his typology of three levels of meaning that are normally involved in ritual (1999: 70–4). *Low-order meaning* is grounded in distinction (a dog is not a cat) and is virtually the same as what is meant by information in information theory. Low-order meaning answers the question "what is it?" but it doesn't have much to say about the question "what does it all mean?" *Middle-order meaning* does not so much distinguish as connect: its concern is with similarities, analogies, emotional resonances and its chief form is metaphor (the fog comes on little cat feet). Art and poetry operate primarily at this level and it is very important for ritual, in which the focus on techniques of the body in no way excludes symbolic meanings. Since ritual depends heavily on exact repetition, it cannot convey much information – it doesn't tell one anything new – but it does link realms of experience and feeling that have perhaps become disconnected in the routine affairs of daily life. *High-order meaning* "is grounded in identity or unity, the radical identification or unification of self with other" (Rappaport 1999: 71). Such meaning, the immediate experience of what has been called "unitive consciousness" (Maslow 1962), can come in mystical experience, but, according to Rappaport, the most frequent context for such an experience is ritual. Here he links back to Durkheim's famous definition of ritual – it is in the effervescence of ritual that the individual concerns of daily life are transcended and society is born.

The world of daily life – economics, politics – is inevitably dependent on information, on making the right distinctions. Rational action theory assumes that all we need is information, in this technical sense of the term. But Rappaport, with Durkheim, argues that if rational action were all there is, there would be no solidarity, no morality, no society and no humanity. The Hobbesian world of all against all is not a human world. Only ritual pulls us out of our egoistic pursuit of our own interests and creates the possibility of a social world. As this highly condensed résumé of Rappaport's argument suggests, there is reason to wonder about the future of ritual in our kind

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of society. Technological and economic progress is based on the enormous proliferation of information, but information is in a zero/sum relation to meaning. Undermining middle- and high-order meaning is not just a threat to ritual and religion, if Rappaport is right, but to society and humanity as well.

Both Rappaport in the last pages of his book and Durkheim in the Conclusion of *Elementary Forms* refer to the difficulty yet necessity of ritual performance in the contemporary world. Rappaport refers to the "skepticism and cynicism" with regard to such matters today and Durkheim refers to the "moral cold" which he already experienced as current in his day. Both have some optimism that, as has happened before, new resources for ritual meaning and moral solidarity could emerge once again in modern society. Neither of them, to my knowledge, explicitly discussed the subject of anti-ritualism. They seem to imply that modernity entails a gradual erosion of the sacred as expressed in ritual rather than an active opposition to it. Mary Douglas has helped the discussion by making anti-ritual an explicit topic of analysis.

Ritual in the work of Mary Douglas

Mary Douglas is, I believe, the most interesting living Durkheimian. Her work is voluminous and she has frequently returned to the subject of ritual. In the necessarily brief space I can devote to her, I would like to concentrate on her early, but very influential, book, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* ([1970] 1982). The whole book can be seen as centrally concerned with the threat to ritual in contemporary life, the source and meaning of anti-ritualism, and the possibility of countering it. Her point of departure is an incisive analysis of the destructive consequences of the Vatican II reform that led to the abandonment of Friday abstinence, that is, the prohibition of eating meat on Fridays. For what she calls the "Bog Irish," that is, working-class Irish living in London, that prohibition was central to their understanding of themselves and their world. She tries to understand how middle-class reformers could so totally fail to understand the meaning of this ritual prohibition.

She begins her effort to understand ritual and anti-ritual tendencies in modern life with some interesting observations of Basil Bernstein's about London families in the mid-twentieth century and uses them to construct a general theory of the relation between social control and symbolic codes. Bernstein noted that there were two rather different forms of family in his sample and that these two forms differed by class. Working-class families used what he called positional control systems and restricted speech codes and middle-class families used personal control systems and elaborated speech codes.

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Because the word "restricted" is invidious in a way I think neither Bernstein nor Douglas intends, I will henceforth speak of "condensed" rather than "restricted" speech codes in contrast to elaborated ones, and will make this terminological change even when quoting them.

Douglas describes the condensed speech code that is generated in the positional family:

> The child in this family is controlled by the continual building up of a sense of social pattern: of ascribed role categories. If he asks 'Why must I do this?' the answer is in terms of relative position. Because I said so (hierarchy). Because you're a boy (sex role). Because children always do (age status). Because you're the oldest (seniority). As he grows, his experience flows into a grid of role categories; right and wrong are learnt in terms of given structure; he himself is seen only in relation to that structure. (Douglas [1970] 1982: 24)

Douglas notes that this pattern can be found in some aristocratic as well as working-class families. She then describes the other form:

> By contrast, in the family system which Professor Bernstein calls personal a fixed pattern of roles is not celebrated, but rather the autonomy and unique value of the individual. When the child asks a question the mother feels bound to answer it by as full an explanation as she knows. The curiosity of the child is used to increase his verbal control, to elucidate causal relations, to teach him to assess the consequences of his acts. Above all his behaviour is made sensitive to the personal feelings of others, by inspecting his own feelings. Why can't I do it? Because your father's feeling worried; because I've got a headache. How would you like it if you were a dog? (Douglas [1970] 1982: 26)

Douglas quotes Bernstein to the effect that in the middle-class family the child is being regulated by the feelings of the regulator: "'Daddy will be pleased, hurt, disappointed, angry, ecstatic if you go on doing this' . . . Control is effected through either the verbal manipulation of feelings or through the establishment of reasons which link the child to his acts" ([1970] 1982: 26).

Douglas sums up the middle-class pattern in a way that should give us pause: "In this way the child is freed from a system of rigid positions, but made a prisoner of a system of feelings and abstract principles" ([1970] 1982: 27). I'm sure that I speak for most of us when I say that "we" think the personal form and the elaborated code are surely preferable to the positional form and the condensed code, to a considerable degree because the personal form and the elaborated code would seem to foster in the child just the individual initiative that we have come to value so highly. Yet Douglas, well before anyone was talking about Foucault, is suggesting that the personal form of control is still control, and perhaps, in its own way, as coercive as the positional form.

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But I would draw a further conclusion. No one ever starts with the elaborated code. All children begin with positional control and the condensed language code because personal control and the elaborated code require skills that no newborn has. The relation between mother and child, or perhaps we should better say between parent and child, is necessarily positional, because highly asymmetrical: an infant needs to be held, cared for, talked to or sung to, but cannot be addressed with elaborate appeals to feelings or ideas, at least not for quite a while. In fact, interaction with an infant looks suspiciously like ritual. Linguists have discovered that in all cultures parents speak to infants in something they call "motherese" (see, e.g. Pinker 1994: 39–41) a kind of simplified, highly repetitive, sing-song, partly nonsense, kind of language, one that communicates feeling rather than information. Each language has its own version of motherese, to be sure, but the basic characteristics seem to be quite universal. Non-verbal communication with an infant is probably even more important. Erik Erikson (1968) suggested that the "greeting ceremonial" between mother and child, marking the beginning of the infant's day, is the root of all subsequent ritualization.

Infants become human because of habitual, non-discursive, verbal and non-verbal interaction with adults, which is, in Basil Bernstein's terms, necessarily positional in control and condensed in speech code. Dissanayake puts it well when, as we have seen above, she says the function of this kind of interaction is to "attune or synchronize, emotionally conjoin, and enculturate the participants" (2000: 401) or, we could say, to position them, to give them an identity relative to others, to provide them a social location. And that is what ritual is basically doing. Not only in infants, but in the infancy of the species, as we have seen, there is reason to believe that language itself developed out of ritual, differentiated out of an initial fusion with music, "musilanguage" (Brown 2000), the motherese of the species so to speak.

If, as I have argued, positional control and condensed code are basic to our humanity and cannot be dispensed with, why did we develop personal control and the elaborated code in the first place? Mary Douglas ([1970] 1982) has two answers to this. One has to do with how strong social solidarity is in any given society. A society with clear boundaries and well-defined roles is positional by definition, and will almost certainly have a well-developed ritual system involving a condensed speech code, while societies with loose boundaries and not very well-defined roles require that people relate to each other on a more or less ad hoc basis, negotiating each encounter as they go along, with little taken for granted, and thus will be personal in control and elaborated in speech. She is at pains to argue that there is no overall historical tendency to go from condensed to elaborated – that is, tribal people cannot

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be presumed to have strong solidarity and well developed rituals because we have instances such as the pygmies of central Africa who are both loosely bounded and largely free of ritual. Be that as it may, her primary interest is in contemporary society and the way in which the division of labor, which is for her the second source of personal control and elaborated code, differentially impacts working-class and middle-class families:

> It is essential to realize that the elaborated code is a product of the division of labour. The more highly differentiated the social system, the more specialised the decision-making roles – then the more the pressure for explicit channels of communication concerning a wide range of policies and their consequences. The demands of the industrial system are pressing hard now upon education to produce more and more verbally articulate people who will be promoted to entrepreneurial roles. By inference the [condensed] code will be found where these pressures are weakest [that is to say among people whose jobs are both routine and require little verbal facility]. (Douglas [1970] 1982: 21)

Although Douglas finds the social basis for positional control and condensed code in some modern professions, the military for example, most of the professions that increasingly dominate the higher echelons of our occupational world require people well versed in personal control and elaborated speech. The symbolic analysts, as Robert Reich characterizes our top professionals, are critical by their very job description. Douglas characterizes them as follows:

> Here are the people who live by using elaborated speech to review and revise existing categories of thought. To challenge received ideas is their very bread and butter. They (or should I say we?) practise a professional detachment toward any given pattern of experience. The more boldly and comprehensively they apply their minds to rethinking, the better their chances of professional success. Thus the value of their radical habit of thought is socially confirmed, and reinforced. For with the rise to professional eminence comes the geographical and social mobility that detaches them from their original community. With such validation, they are likely to raise their children in the habit of intellectual challenge and not to impose a positional control pattern.
>
> (Douglas [1970] 1982: 31)

Indeed, she goes on to say, they are likely to prefer personal forms of control and to focus on feelings rather than rules in child-rearing. As a result, "ideas about morality and the self get detached from the social structure" ([1970] 1982: 31). It is not that children raised in such a milieu lack ethical ideas; sensitivity to the feelings of others can arouse strong ethical passions when others are observed to be suffering. The problem is that without some positional

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sense of social membership and without strong condensed symbols, ethical sensitivities may simply dissipate into good intentions without leading to sustained moral commitments.

Douglas is very even-handed in her sense that we need both modes of relating. She affirms "the duty of everyone to preserve their vision from the constraints of the [condensed] code when judging any social situation . . . [W]e must recognise that the value of particular social forms can only be judged objectively by the analytic power of the elaborated code" ([1970] 1982: 166). She is well aware that condensed codes in the context of positional authority can be both authoritarian and unjust. "Do it because I said so," is an example of condensed code that carries the implication of some, perhaps quite unpleasant, non-verbal sanction that will follow if the recipient of the command rejects it. Except under conditions of extreme emergency, an elaborated request for reasons is justified. Similarly the condensed statement "Little girls don't do that" is open to challenge with respect to the whole taken–for-granted definition of gender. These are the kinds of reflection, which lead "us" to presume that personal control and elaborated code are always preferable to the alternative.

Yet Douglas warns us against precisely that conclusion:

> There is no person whose life does not need to unfold in a coherent symbolic system. The less organized the way of life, the less articulated the symbolic system may be. But social responsibility is no substitute for symbolic forms and indeed depends upon them. When ritualism is openly despised the philanthropic impulse is in danger of defeating itself. For it is an illusion to suppose that there can be organisation without symbolic expression . . . Those who despise ritual, even at its most magical, are cherishing in the name of reason a very irrational concept of communication. (Douglas [1970] 1982: 50)

So where does Douglas leave "us," including her? She is not asking us, as some converts to various forms of fundamentalism are, to abandon our personal and elaborated selves and jump back into the positional box. No, she is asking us with all our critical rationality to see that we need both forms of control and both codes. She writes:

> In the long run, the argument of this book is that the elaborated code challenges its users to turn round on themselves and inspect their values, to reject some of them, and to resolve to cherish positional forms of control and communication wherever these are available . . . No one would deliberately choose the elaborated code and the personal control system who is aware of the seeds of alienation it contains. (Douglas [1970] 1982: 157)

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Whether, even in the most secular society where the elaborated code and personal control systems predominate, ritual can really be abandoned remains to be seen.

Ritual in various spheres of life

Our society does not understand ritual very well and for many of us even the term is pejorative; further, the great religious rituals that in almost all earlier societies carried what Rappaport (1999) calls high-order meaning have been privatized so that they act, not for society as a whole, but only for the particular groups of believers who celebrate them. The ambiguous term secularization might be used to describe not only the alleged decline of religion, but the decline of ritual as well. But, although some forms of ritual have become less evident, or retreated from the public sphere, it is also true that even in contemporary society we remain surrounded by ritual in a myriad of forms. It might even be argued that ritual is to be found everywhere that humans live together if we look in the right places, although where those places are may be very different from one society to the next. In this connection I would like to pursue a bit further the idea of interaction ritual as developed by Goffman and Collins.

Like so much else in the study of ritual the idea of interaction ritual can be found in germ in Durkheim's *Elementary Forms*:

> [The] stimulating action of society is not felt in exceptional circumstances alone. There is virtually no instant of our lives in which a certain rush of energy fails to come to us from outside ourselves. In all kinds of acts that express the understanding, esteem, and affection of his neighbor, there is a lift that the man who does his duty feels, usually without being aware of it. But that lift sustains him; the feeling society has for him uplifts the feeling he has for himself. Because he is in moral harmony with his neighbor, he gains new confidence, courage, and boldness in action – quite like the man of faith who believes he feels the eyes of his god turned benevolently toward him. Thus is produced what amounts to a perpetual uplift of our moral being.
>
> (Durkheim [1912] 1995: 213)

Goffman (1967) made the point that any social interaction, even between two persons, inevitably has a ritual dimension involving stylized elements of both speech and gesture. Collins (1998) has built on Goffman's work to argue that the basic social fact is the local interaction ritual, and that individuals cannot be said to have a higher degree of reality than the interaction in which they engage since they are in fact constituted in and through the interaction. Goffman (1967) saw deference as one indispensable element in

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interaction ritual. In hierarchical societies the ritual enactment of shared moral understandings expresses a sacred hierarchical order and the place of the interacting partners in it. In our society where the moral order emphasizes equality, even though hierarchy is inevitably present, there is a special effort to protect the sacredness of the individual person, no matter how disparate the status of the individuals involved. Even in a relatively fleeting encounter, then, the basic elements of ritual can be discerned: the synchronizing rhythm of conversational speech and gesture and the affirmation of social solidarity that they imply, regardless of the content of the conversation, and, if only by implication, the recognition of the sacredness, either of the code governing the interaction, the individuals interacting, or both.

Even in mundane daily life, ritual is not only a matter of occasional meeting and parting; it is very much part of the periodicity of life. Eating together may well be one of our oldest rituals, since humans are the only primates who regularly share food (Isaac 1978). Margaret Visser (1992) has made the case for the centrality of what she calls "rituals of dinner," because eating together is just the sort of occasion that makes ritual necessary. She writes:

> Table manners are social agreements; they are devised precisely because violence could so easily erupt at dinner. Eating is aggressive by nature and the implements required for it could quickly become weapons; table manners are, most basically, a system of taboos designed to ensure that violence remains out of the question. But intimations of greed and rage keep breaking in: many mealtime superstitions, for example, point to the imminent death of one of the guests. Eating is performed by the individual, in his or her most personal interest; eating in company, however, necessarily places the individual face to face with the group. It is the group that insists on table manners; "they" will not accept a refusal to conform. The individual's "personal interest" lies therefore not only in ensuring his or her bodily survival, but also in pleasing, placating, and not frightening or disgusting the other diners. (Visser 1992: xii–xiii)

Although Visser underlines the elements of personal interest and group pressure, which are always involved in ritual, one would need to add that the "ritual of dinner," in the sense of "breaking bread together," implicitly, and often explicitly, has a religious dimension, as when there is a blessing before or after the meal, or, as in some Asian societies, a token offering to the ancestors precedes the meal.

Periodicity is characteristic of ritual of a wide variety of types ranging from the most secular, or even trivial, to the most solemn and religious. Academic life is highly ritualized and the school year is marked by numerous ritual events. Sporting events, both professional and collegiate have become highly ritualized in modern societies, and follow different seasonal patterns

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depending on the sport. A full discussion of the senses in which sporting events can be interpreted as rituals would exceed the bounds of this chapter. Suffice it to say that the absence or weakness of the performative dimension in Rappaport's (1999) sense make sporting events, like concerts, operas, plays or movies seen in theaters, problematic as ritual events in the full sense of the word. If involvement with a team becomes a major life concern, or even gives rise to "fan cults" in some cases, this might move such sporting events more fully into the ritual category. Political life also gives rise to various periodicities, including national holidays, elections, inaugurations, and so forth (the nation-state as a sacred object will be considered further below). Religious ritual has a strong tendency toward periodicity – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam require weekly worship – and yearly liturgical calendars are widespread. Economic transactions, as Durkheim pointed out, are the least likely to be ritualized, being highly utilitarian in character. Nonetheless, economic exchange in pre-modern societies is often accompanied by ritual, and a full analysis of economic life in our own society would probably discover more than a few ritual elements.

William McNeill in his important book *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (1995) deals with many issues relevant to the concerns of this chapter, but he begins with military drill, not something students of ritual would usually start with. The two places where what McNeill calls "muscular bonding" have been most central have been, in his analysis, religion and the military (1995: 1–11). Learning that from McNeill, I was not entirely surprised to discover that not only was Colin Powell raised an Episcopalian, but that his service as an altar boy prepared him psychologically for a career in the army. The proximity of Episcopal liturgy and military life, while making a certain amount of sense, was not something I would spontaneously have imagined. McNeill does a great deal to clarify this otherwise somewhat disconcerting conjuncture. His starting point is frankly autobiographical: how did it happen that as a draftee in 1941, while enduring basic training in a camp on the barren plains of Texas, he actually enjoyed the hours spent in close-order drill? His answer in his admittedly somewhat speculative history of keeping together in time (after all who bothered much to write about such things) is that "moving our muscles rhythmically and giving voice consolidate group solidarity by altering human feelings" (McNeill 1995: viii).

Virtually all small communities of which we have knowledge, whether tribal or peasant, have been united on significant occasions by community-wide singing and dancing, usually more or less explicitly religious in content. (McNeill points out that what we today usually mean by "dancing," namely paired cross-gender performances with some degree of sexual intent, is, when viewed historically, aberrant to the point of being pathological [1995: 65]).

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McNeill notes that in complex societies divided by social class muscular bonding may be the medium through which discontented and oppressed groups can gain the solidarity necessary for challenging the existing social order, using early prophetism in Israel as an example. He puts in perspective something that has often been noticed, namely that the liturgical movements of the more advantaged members of society are apt be relatively sedate, whereas those of the dispossessed can become energetic to the point of inducing trance (McNeill 1995: 86–90).

Close-order drill, McNeill's starting point, turns out to have emerged in only a few rather special circumstances, although dancing in preparation for or celebration after military exploits is widespread in simple societies. Here again there are ambiguities. Intensive drill in the Greek phalanx or trireme provided the social cohesion and sense of self-respect that reinforced citizenship in the ancient *polis*, but in early modern Europe its meaning was more ambiguous, sometimes reinforcing citizenship, sometimes absolutism. McNeill gives the interesting example of the strongly-bonded citizen armies of the French Revolution that then turned out to be manipulable elements in the establishment of Napoleon's autocracy (1995: 113–36). His comments on the use of rhythmic motion, derived in part from military drill but in part from calisthenics, in the creation of modern nationalism, culminating in Hitler's mass demonstrations (inspired in part by the mass socialist parades on May Day, which in turn were inspired in part by Corpus Christi celebrations), are very suggestive (1995: 147–8). But if such sinister uses of keeping together in time are always possible, all forms of nationalism have drawn on similar techniques.

Benedict Anderson, in his valuable analysis of modern nationalism (1991), describes what he calls unisonance, which is another form of keeping together in time:

> [T]here is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests – above all in the form of poetry and songs. Take national anthems, for example, sung on national holidays. No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance. Singing the Marseillaise, Waltzing Matilda, and Indonesia Raya provide occasions for unisonality, for the echoed physical realization of the imagined community. (So does listening to [and maybe silently chiming in with] the recitation of ceremonial poetry, such as sections of *The Book of Common Prayer*.) How selfless this unisonance feels! If we are aware that others are singing these songs precisely when and as we are, we have no idea who they may be, or even where, out of earshot, they are singing. Nothing connects us all but imagined sound. (Anderson 1991: 145)

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Through the prevalence of television, rituals today can be shared by millions within and even beyond the nation state. I think of two instances: one where ritual worked effectively and one where it collapsed. I am old enough to remember well the November afternoon in 1963 when John F. Kennedy was shot in Dallas, Texas. For the following three days millions were glued to their television screens as a ritual drama of great complexity unfolded. The rituals were both national and religious. They involved the casket lying in state in the Rotunda of the United States Capitol, and then being taken by procession to the railway station, from which it was transported by train to Boston for a Catholic funeral mass presided over by the Cardinal Archbishop of Boston. The sudden loss of a head of state is apt to be traumatic in any society. The three days of ritual following Kennedy's death did seem to help make it possible to return to some kind of normal life after such a catastrophe.

In democratic societies, elections are ritual events, even if minimally religious ones. The very fact that millions of people go to the polls on one day and that there is great national attention to the outcome guarantees a high order of emotional intensity to such an event. Since television, elections have gathered very large audiences to await the outcome and the ritual concession and acceptance speeches that follow. But in the United States federal election of 2000, nothing seemed to go right. The television media made two wrong calls as to who won the election and then had to admit that the election in Florida, on which the Electoral College vote hung, was too close to call. What followed was anything but effective ritual. Almost every key actor in the events after the election failed to follow the appropriate ritual script – indeed things reached the point where it wasn't clear what the script was. The resolution of the election by a partisan vote of the Supreme Court of the United States, which has no role to play in elections according to the American Constitution, was the final failure of ritual closure. A failed electoral ritual produced a winner with severely damaged legitimacy.[12]

Conclusion

In conclusion, with the help of a couple of examples, I would like to suggest that any adequate account of ritual would need to situate ritual and anti-ritual in a long-term historical perspective. Already in *Natural Symbols* Mary Douglas ([1970] 1982), though starting with anti-ritual tendencies in the Vatican II reforms, gives her reflections a deeper historical background by frequent reference to the Protestant Reformation and even earlier renewal movements that had anti-ritual tendencies. She also points out that

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the extirpation of ritual is never complete, that the Protestants in depriving the Eucharist of its deep ritual meaning by reducing it to a mere commemoration at the same time made the Bible into a sort of ritual talisman. The doctrine of the "Word alone," though it had major consequences for the religious and social life of Northern Europeans ever since the Reformation, nonetheless gave rise to its own forms of re-ritualization.

But the perseverance of ritual in changing forms as well as the periodic anti-ritual challenges to it would require a historical study that would take us far beyond the confines of this chapter. Here I can only allude to a couple of studies that contribute to this important project. One is a study of the early history of the Vedic/Hindu tradition that has survived for over 3,000 years. The other is Mary Douglas' recent work ([1993] 2001; 2001) on ancient Israel.

In his *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion*, Brian K. Smith (1989) presents what I believe is a basically Durkheimian history of the development of ritual in India.[13] Although he does not cite Durkheim, he does draw significantly from Marcel Mauss and from Mauss' student, Louis Dumont. Smith makes the point that it is ritual action and not its symbolic interpretation that does the work of unifying the fragmented:

> For the Vedic priests and metaphysicians, ritual activity does not "symbolize" or "dramatize" reality; it constructs, integrates, and constitutes the real. Ritual forms the naturally formless, it connects the inherently disconnected, and it heals the ontological disease of unreconstructed nature, the state toward which all created things and beings naturally tend. (Smith 1989: 51)

Interestingly enough, Smith, writing before Rappaport's (1999) book was published, organizes his argument around three levels of meaning that are parallel to Rappaport's low-, middle-, and high-order levels. Smith argues that Vedic ritual works primarily with the middle level of resemblance, analogy, and metaphor, making connections between the cosmos, society and the individual, connections that position the participants in relation to one another, the Gods, and the natural world. Here we are clearly seeing the Bernstein/Douglas condensed code and positional control at work. Smith sees ritual as operating between two opposite poles, either of which would make ritual action impossible, poles that can be equated, I would argue, with Rappaport's low- and high-order meaning, but defined by Smith as radical difference and radical identity (1989: 51–2). The pole of radical difference is a form of low-order meaning that could be interpreted in contemporary terms as an extreme nominalistic atomism, a kind of *tabula rasa* from which scientific observation and investigation can begin (although however much the philosophy of science prefers reductionism, analogy seems always to

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sneak in by the back door). At this level operationally defined propositions replace metaphor and the world of ritual is (apparently) abolished. The pole of radical identity, a form of high-order meaning, implies a fusion of self and world that actually appears in the history of Indian religion, but is always antithetical to ritual and its differentiations, although in the end mystical union can no more absolutely do without metaphor and its accompanying ritual than can science.

Smith suggests two significant kinds of change in the history of Indian ritual, both of which are involved in the development of what has come to be called Hinduism, though, according to Smith, Hinduism never abandoned its Vedic core. One of these changes involves the development of a non-dualistic metaphysics and the practice of mystical union, first in the Upanishads and then in the (from the point of view of Hinduism) heretical religions of Buddhism and Jainism. From about the sixth century BC the figure of the renouncer appeared both within and beside the Hindu tradition. The renouncer, typically a religious intellectual who has withdrawn to the forest, stands outside the ritual system and the society it constantly reproduces, most notably outside the caste system, though ultimately, as Louis Dumont ([1960] 1980) has argued, the renouncer and the society renounced in fact form a complementarity. The anti-ritualism of the renouncer is illustrated quite early, according to Smith, in the Mundaka Upanishad which, "as part of a critique of ritualism in light of the new emphasis on mystical knowledge alone, declares sacrifices to be 'leaky vessels,' unfit for the true voyage – the attainment of liberation from *karma*" (1989: 106). At its most radical, the quest for high-order meaning through mystical union obliterates the world of ritual, though in the long run it gives ritual a new meaning. Self-liberation is a kind of "sacrifice" of the self, thus keeping the ritual metaphor (Smith 1989: 173, 209), but the path of self-liberation in both Vedanta Hinduism and Buddhism soon developed its own ritual complex.

The other great change, which occurred at approximately the same period, is the domestication of Vedic ritual. Early Vedic ritual of highly elaborated sacrifice focused on royal and aristocratic lineages and was an expression of the political power of the lineage. With the rise of centralized monarchies these great rituals fell into disuse, but what had been minor domestic rituals under the old system took on a new centrality. It was domestic sacrifice, carried out by the householder and his wife in the home, that became the core of Hindu practice and the place where Vedic ritual survived until today (Smith 1989: 195–9).

Even this very inadequate summary of Smith's complex and subtle argument suggests two important points about ritual: (1) Ritual can take many,

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sometimes highly diverse, forms; ritual and society tend to change in relation to each other. (2) Ritual under a variety of circumstances gives rise to anti-ritual movements that can have significant consequences for the history of religion, though the elimination of ritual is not one of them.

Mary Douglas ([1993] 2001; 2001), drawing on the work of many others, has recently pointed out developments in the history of ritual in ancient Israel that are to some degree parallel to the Indian developments. The prophetic movement from the eighth to the sixth centuries BC in Israel was often quite critical of ritual. It did not, as in the case of India, offer mystical contemplation as an alternative. Rather it was ethical demand that was said to be more acceptable to God than ritual – righteousness, rather than sacrifice – a view summed up in Psalm 51, 16–17: "For thou hast no delight in sacrifice; were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." The Hebrew prophet was not in the Indian sense a renouncer – we might even coin the term "denouncer" as a counter-term for the Hebrew prophets – but, as the passage from the Psalms suggests, the external sacrifice, as in the case of India, has become an internal one. However different the two examples, we can discern, in Bernstein/Douglas terms, a personal rather than a positional note in both cases. What these examples suggest is that anti-ritual movements of religious renewal begin long before the Protestant Reformation, at least as early as the axial age, the first millennium BC.

The other change in ancient Israel was the domestication of ritual, related to a number of social changes. The late pre-exilic effort to centralize the sacrificial ritual in the temple in Jerusalem meant that sacrifice could no longer be performed in local areas. With the exile, the sacrificial system broke down completely, although it was revived, perhaps in truncated form, during the Persian Period and later, finally collapsing with the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in AD 70. During all this period the ritual system was by no means abandoned and has survived until today at the level of the local congregation and the household, particularly in connection with issues of ritual purity. Similar and different sorts of changes could be traced in all the religions that have survived over long periods of time in greatly changing social conditions. And if ritual has survived in all of the great religious traditions, in spite of periodic anti-ritual movements of great intensity, it survives in ostensibly secular contexts as well, as the work of Goffman and Collins cited above indicates.

The present moment, with its tendency to privilege information, that is low-order meaning, above middle- and high-order meaning, is not a propitious one for ritual or even for the understanding of it. Nevertheless, I have

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argued, in the spirit of Durkheim and in agreement with Rappaport, that ritual is "humanity's basic social act," a position that, though contestable, has a great deal of evidence in its favor.

NOTES

This chapter has a considerable overlap with, though significant differences from, my chapter "The Ritual Roots of Society and Culture," in Michelle Dillon, ed., *Handbook for the Sociology of Religion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

1 For a recent discussion see N. J. Allen, W. S. F. Pickering, and W. Watts Miller (1998).

2 In the original, the entire definition is in italics (Durkheim 1968: 65).

3 Anne Warfield Rawls has usefully emphasized what she calls "concrete practices," that is actual bodily movements, as the basis of Durkheim's theory of ritual. It was her article, "Durkheim's Treatment of Practice: Concrete Practice vs. Representation as the Foundation of Reason" (2001) that called this passage to my attention.

4 I should note that though, on occasion, Douglas has criticized Clifford Geertz for being "idealistic" in discussing culture independent of its embeddedness in society, in this instance she uses Geertz to reinforce her argument about exemplification, citing his book *Negara: The Theater State in Nineteenth Century Bali* (1980).

5 Goffman, like Collins, is explicit in recognizing his debt to Durkheim.

6 In spite of the Durkheimian echoes of this passage, Deacon makes no reference to Durkheim, nor to Goffman or Collins. The strength of disciplinary boundaries seems to have necessitated independent discovery, though we cannot rule out the influence of unconscious diffusion of ideas.

7 For a somewhat different attempt to find ritual at the basis of kinship in the very earliest human society see N. J. Allen (1998).

8 Keith Hart in his preface to this posthumously published book invokes Émile Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* and holds that Rappaport's book is "comparable in scope to his great predecessor's work," (1999: xiv) a judgment with which I agree.

9 On the coevolution of mind and culture see Clifford Geertz, "The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind" (1973a).

10 Victor Turner has usefully emphasized the relation between ritual and dramatic performance, and the boundary between them is indeed fuzzy. See particularly part II of his *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience* (1985).

11 Asad emphasizes the painful aspect of ritual discipline, but he focuses particularly on the sacrament of penance. See "Pain and Truth in Medieval Christian Ritual," in Asad (1993).

12 Clifford Geertz brilliantly describes a failed ritual of much more modest scale in his "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example" (1973b). The events of September 11, 2001 may have given George W. Bush a legitimacy that he had not previously had, but that in no way invalidates the argument that the presidential election of 2000 was a failed ritual.

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13 In his subsequent book, *Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste* (1994) Smith draws explicitly and extensively, if critically, from Durkheim with respect to the social basis of classification in the Indian tradition.

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