

# A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON: THE QUESTION OF RATIONALITY\*

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**Abstract.** David Bloor's thought experiment is taken into consideration to suggest that the rationality of the Other cannot be inferred by way of argument for the reason that it is unavoidably contained as a hidden supposition by any argument engaged in proving it. We are able to understand a different culture only as far as we recognize in it the same kind of rationality that works in our own culture. Another kind of rationality is either impossible, or indiscernible.

**Key words:** rationality, relativism, universalism, cultural difference, uniqueness of logic, thought experiment

One can find in Boas the following instance of a cross-cultural encounter: The well-known traveller Burchell met a group of Bushmen near Garib whom he asked about the difference between a good action and a bad one. Since they couldn't provide him with a satisfactory answer, Burchell presented us with "the most wonderful report of their complete lack of reasoning power". In the same way, the Fuegians, questioned on their religious beliefs in incomprehensible terms, were described as incapable of ideas that go beyond the simplest needs of everyday life<sup>1</sup>. The "primitive" people themselves had their misunderstandings in their own grasp of Western culture. The cargo cult might be seen for instance as a result of such a miscomprehension. Noticing the ships loaded with goods which were meant to the colonizers, they concluded that the ancestors must have been lured into a pact with the whites. Thus the cult was intended to restore the benevolence of the powerful ancestors. The anthropological field literature is exceedingly rich in such cross-cultural misunderstandings and there's not much wonder that no other than the founder of the relativistic school in anthropology was the first to regard them as the ethnographer's failure to take into account and to study in their local context the specific traits of the particular culture he approaches. Prior to Boas, the general

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Boas, *Race, Language and Culture* (1940), Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1982: 626.

anthropological mood was that of a universalist manner of conceiving culture which involves a kind of a “psychic unity of mankind” (as Bastian put it) and therefore an important core of psychological and cognitive traits that are shared by all human beings. With this in prospect, there could be no clash of understanding between cultures; moreover, there could be no “cultures” to speak of since culture was comprehended in the singular rather than in the plural<sup>2</sup>. Starting with Boas and his students, the anthropological research witnessed a switch from “culture” to “cultures” together with the depiction of each culture as a unique and irreducible pattern of behaviour. The paradigm shift had a weighty impact on the understanding of cross-cultural translatability – by which I mean the ability of any given culture to convert in its own terms a certain constituent of another culture which could equally be a word, a concept, a conduct, or a cultural trait of any kind. When dealing with a single widespread culture and a homogenous human mind, there is little expectation of any cultural diversity, other than a developed-versus-undeveloped based one, hence the enthusiastic picture of an unconditioned translatability. On the contrary, the relativistic stance claims that each culture is a more or less consistent pattern of thought and behaviour<sup>3</sup> and the only way to understand the significance of a detached trait is to put it in relation with the whole. The odds of cultural translation are thus drastically limited by the capacity of the researcher to grasp a cultural pattern and to interpret in the light of the whole the distinct elements in hand. There is no such thing as a solitary trait. All the features are interconnected so as to form an unalterable entirety. The psychological and linguistic universals are no more here to guarantee translatability. In dealing with cultures, the relativistic view deals with a variety of distinct worlds, each of them conveyed in its own unique language.

In spite of this general assumption, the researcher is seen as being able to connect his mind to a totally different culture and to draw pertinent inferences about the new kind of thinking he met. No matter which theory they believe in, the culture researchers are all ascertained that understanding another culture, however different it might be to their own, is an attainable task as long as the methods are properly employed. However, the problem of understanding other cultures seems to be a little more complicated than that. While any anthropological researcher of present time is willing to assume cultural diversity as a fact, he may be less enthusiastic in admitting that he lacks any reliable scientific basis that would allow him to trust his understanding of other cultures and to make considerations on the rationality of the Other. To maintain that a particular exotic culture makes use of a completely different type of logic is to admit that the culture in question is impenetrable to anthropological research and it's hard to believe that a practising anthro-

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. George W. Stocking, Jr, “Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective”, *American Anthropologist*, 68, 1966: “I found no instances of the plural form in writers other than Boas prior to 1895. Men referred to ‘cultural stages’ or ‘forms of culture’, as indeed Tylor had before, but they did not speak of ‘cultures’. The plural appears with regularity only in the first generation of Boas’ students around 1910”.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (1934), Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1959: 46.

pologist would undermine the very basic ideas of his discipline by professing convictions that question the comprehensibility of its object. In some extent or another, a certain belief in a psychic unity of mankind managed to subsist in the background of any anthropological research, however relativistic it claims to be. The vision of a rational other was a constant presence in the history of anthropology<sup>4</sup>.

My paper suggests that the rationality of the Other cannot be decided – for the simple reason that it is already contained as a hidden supposition by any argument engaged in proving it. As an example, I will consider David Bloor’s thought experiment inspired by Peter Winch’s critique to Evans-Pritchard’s discussions on the witchcraft institution at Azande. Let us first have a look to its background. As Evans-Pritchard seems to suggest, the entire network of Zande tradition related to witchcraft entails what a Western mind would tag as a logical contradiction. In short, witchcraft plays an essential part in Zande culture. Any evil that happens to these people is interpreted to be the direct result of sorcery. They also believe that witchcraft is an inherited physical trait which is unavoidably transmitted from father to son and from mother to daughter, which means that once a witch was attested, all his/her ancestors of the same gender were also in the possession of the witchcraft attribute. Besides, the tribe developed an accurate method to decide if a particular member was a witch. As a result of the post-mortem tests, some men were confirmed as witches and some weren’t. In addition, one can find whether a particular person is bewitching him or not by asking an oracle whose answer is in terms of “yes” or “no”. And here comes the tricky part. According to their beliefs, all the members of the Zande clan are biologically related to one another through the male line. The consequence of this route of thought is obvious: if a certain man of the clan is proved to be a witch, then the entire clan is composed by witches. However, the Azande claim that only a few members of the clan are to be considered as witches:

“To our minds it appears evident that if a man is proven a witch the whole of his clan are *ipso facto* witches, since the Zande clan is a group of persons related biologically to one another through the male line. Azande see the sense of this argument but they do not accept its conclusions, and it would involve the whole notion of witchcraft in contradiction were they to do so. In practice they regard only close paternal kinsmen of a known witch as witches. It is only in theory that they extend the imputation to all a witch’s clansmen. If in the eyes of the world payment for homicide by witchcraft stamps the kin of a guilty man as witches, a post-mortem in which no witchcraft-substance is discovered in a man clears his paternal kin of suspicion. Here again we might reason that if a man be found by post-mortem immune

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<sup>4</sup> For a history of the rationality problem in anthropology, see Bradd Shore, *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning*, Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1996.

from witchcraft-substance all his clan must also be immune, but Azande do not act as though they were of this opinion”<sup>5</sup>.

Evans-Pritchard didn’t seem to derive from here that the Azande are *not* logical. On the contrary, he repeatedly insisted on the rational character of Zande culture. Their behaviour is consistent and the motivation they provide for it is “intellectually coherent”. Zande mind is “logical and inquiring within the framework of its culture”. On Evans-Pritchard’s opinion, if Azande do not perceive the contradiction *as we do*, this is because they have no *theoretical* interest on the matter. The Azande are only concerned about the concrete acts of witchcraft and they clearly have means to identify the doer. They never ask the oracle whether a particular person is a born witch or not; they ask instead if that person *is bewitching them in specific circumstances*. However, there is a better explanation for this apparent contradiction to be found in Evans-Pritchard’s account. It seems that Azande found a convenient contrivance to protect the unattested born witch from suspicion of witchcraft by introducing a distinction between a potential and an active witch: even that the “witchcraft-substance” is present in somebody, it may remain idle during his lifetime, and a man who doesn’t use his witchcraft-substance could hardly be stamped as a witch<sup>6</sup>. What Evans-Pritchard called “the general coherence and interdependence of Zande beliefs”<sup>7</sup> seems to be pretty well sustained by his description of them. The fact is that Evans-Pritchard never suggested that the Zande culture employed a *different kind of logic*. Quite the opposite, he clearly stated that even the Azande are different, the consistency of their cultural system is a fact that leads us to the conclusion that there is a great deal of similarity between the way they think and the kind of thinking that runs the Western societies:

“I hope that I have persuaded the reader of one thing, namely, the intellectual consistency of Zande notions. They only appear inconsistent when ranged like lifeless museum objects. When we see how an individual uses them we may say that they are mystical but we cannot say that his use of them is illogical or even that it is uncritical. I had no difficulty in using Zande notions as Azande themselves use them. Once the idiom is learnt the rest is easy, for in Zandeland one mystical idea follows on another as reasonably as one common-sense idea follows on another in our own society”<sup>8</sup>.

Evans-Pritchard’s viewpoint is stated here as clearly as in other different places<sup>9</sup>. In his opinion, the culture systems he studied are ruled by patterns of

<sup>5</sup> E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1937: 24.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*: 25, 42, 336.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*: 540.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*: 540–541.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Evans-Pritchard, “Lévy-Bruhl’s Theory of Primitive Mentality”, *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts* (University of Egypt), 2, 1934: 1–36. Evans-Pritchard disapproved of

thought which are coherent in the same way that Western thinking is. Letting apart their magic oriented mind which contrasts with the scientific oriented mind of Western people, as well as the specific pattern of their culture, the so-called primitives think in the same logical way. Thinking *is* logical by default, and there is no reason to presume the employing of different kinds of logic in different communities, much less of some contradictory ones.

In spite of Evans-Pritchard's manifest conviction, his account on Zande witchcraft institution is the starting point for a study which is set into motion by entirely opposite views on Zande rationality. In a critical attempt, Peter Winch questioned the very basic assumption of Evans-Pritchard's investigation of "primitive" cultures, namely the uniqueness of logic that makes possible the correlation between scientific and mystical thought<sup>10</sup>. Zande thought involves a contradiction which is easily recognized as such by a Western mind, but Azande seem to pay no attention to it. Owing to their lack in "theoretical interest", they never pushed their thinking on witchcraft to a level at which they could be dragged into contradiction. Winch resorted to Wittgenstein's discussion of game in *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*. The reader is invited to consider a game "such that whoever begins can always win by a particular simple trick. But this has not been realized – so it is a game. Now someone draws our attention to it – and it stops being a game. [...] That means, I want to say, it can also be taken like this: the other man did not draw our attention to anything; he taught us a different game in place of our own. But how can the new game have made the old one obsolete? We now see something different, and can no longer naively go on playing. On the one hand the game consisted in our actions (our play) on the board; and these actions I could perform as well now as before. But on the other hand it was essential to the game that I blindly tried to win; and now I can no longer do that"<sup>11</sup>. Besides the significant analogies between Wittgenstein's case and the Zande witchcraft affair, Winch found an essential difference. When confronted with the contradiction, the Azande *did not* regard their witchcraft establishment as obsolete. They didn't simply abandon their conception of witchcraft once they were faced up to the logical consequences of it, a fact that strongly suggests in Winch's opinion that the Zande

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Lévy-Bruhl's term "prelogical" applied to the primitive modes of thought that appeared to contain inherent contradictions. By "prelogical" Lévy-Bruhl didn't mean "devoid of all order and system", but rather not "conforming to the system of logic which regulates modern science". "Prelogical" didn't stay there for "illogical". However, the prefix "pre" insinuates that we are dealing with a thinking that is not yet logical, i.e. not yet evolved to the stage of the modern scientific thought. Differently put, there is a sort of evolutionary thinking inherent to Lévy-Bruhl's description of "primitive" mind, as well as an idea regarding the uniformity of all "savage" thought. This is the reason why Evans-Pritchard chose to replace "prelogical" with "unscientific".

<sup>10</sup> Peter Winch, "Understanding a primitive society", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, I, 4, 1964: 307–324.

<sup>11</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Pt. II, § 77, as quoted in Peter Winch, "Understanding a primitive society", p. 314.

conception of witchcraft does not make up a theoretical system to be put on the same level with the Western scientific one. Therefore, Winch concluded, not the natives were the ones who committed a category-mistake, but the anthropologist was, and he did so by imposing the rules of his European game to an essentially different one. The uniqueness of logic presumed by Evans-Pritchard's approach is thus rejected. Peter Winch was not the only one to see a contradiction where there is none<sup>12</sup>. While it is true that Evans-Pritchard suggested that the Zande conception of witchcraft would be judged as contradictory by a Western mind<sup>13</sup>, there are additional considerations that promptly exonerate not only the Zande thinking from incoherence, but Evans-Pritchard's as well. Maybe an honest-minded approach of Evans-Pritchard would read the incriminated passage in a more proper manner: even though the Zande thinking might *appear* as contradictory, it is not so.

Let us now return to David Bloor's thought experiment as he put it in *Knowledge and Social Imagery*. First of all, Bloor noticed in Evans-Pritchard's account an essential detail that Winch overlooked. As I mentioned before, the Azande drew a careful distinction between "actual" and "potential" in matters of witchcraft. One could as well inherit the "witchcraft-substance" without being an active witch. The innate "witchcraft-substance" may remain "cool" (i.e. inactive) during an entire lifetime, in which case its bearer is not to be considered a witch. Bloor clearly got this piece of information, yet he didn't seem to get the picture. He continued to argue against Evans-Pritchard as if the latter truly believed that Zande witchcraft institution is based on a contradiction.

Anyway, David Bloor thinks he has a case against Evans-Pritchard. But his purpose is not only to rescue the Zande pattern of culture from inconsistency, but to weaken a common belief (which is Evans-Pritchard's as well) in the potency of logic. A distinction between the uniqueness of logic and the potency of logic is applied in order to reject Peter Winch's conclusion of the self-sufficient character of Zande thought, as well as Evans-Pritchard's idea according to which a logical contradiction might pose a threat to the institution involved. On the one hand, the idea that there is a real contradiction in the Zande notion of witchcraft is related to the belief in the *uniqueness* of logic. On the other hand, the idea that such a contradiction, if noticed

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<sup>12</sup> See for example Seligman's "Foreword" to the original edition of Evans-Pritchard's book: "In this matter the bright and intelligent Azande do not feel any need or desire to be what we call logical, and as we proceed with the book we shall see that the system of omen magic constituted by an appeal to the poison-ordeal is at least as illogical and infinitely more difficult to place among the White Man's categories than the contradictions apparent in the above passage" (C.G. Seligman, "Foreword" to Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1937: xvii). The passage in question, otherwise quoted earlier, is the one where Evans-Pritchard suggested that the witchcraft inheritance belief together with the kinship belief might compel one to extend the witchcraft accusation to the whole clan.

<sup>13</sup> "Azande do not perceive the contradiction as we perceive it because they have no theoretical interest in the subject, and those situations in which they express their beliefs in witchcraft do not force the problem upon them" (Evans-Pritchard *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1937: 25).

by natives, would endanger one of their vital institutions is related to the belief in the *potency* of logic. David Bloor's point resumes Mill's considerations according to which *logic is rather opposed to potent*: "The application of logical schemata is merely a way of arranging our afterthoughts and is always a matter of negotiation"<sup>14</sup>. The thought experiment David Bloor built in order to enforce his own opinion on Zande case is conceived in perfect reverse symmetry to the contradictory situation he read in Evans-Pritchard. This time the Western culture is investigated by an alien anthropologist whose conclusions are practically equivalent to those attributed to Evans-Pritchard:

"Suppose that an alien anthropologist reasoned with us as follows: in your culture a murderer is someone who deliberately kills someone else. Bomber pilots deliberately kill people. Therefore they are murderers. We can see the point of this inference but would no doubt resist the conclusion. Our grounds would be that the alien observer did not really understand what a murderer was. He could not see the difference between the two cases that he had conflated. Perhaps we would reply: murder is an act of individual volition. Bomber pilots are performing a duty, and this duty is specifically sanctioned by governments. We distinguish the special roles appropriate to the armed forces. Consulting his notebook the anthropologist might then tell us that he has seen men shaking their fists at attacking aeroplanes and shouting murderer after them. Our reply to this could then be that there is indeed an analogy between murder and killing in war, and it was no doubt the similarities rather than the differences that were uppermost in the mind of the victims whom he had observed. We may add that it is hardly to be expected that men will be completely logical under such provocation and that what was observed was an understandable lapse from the canons of strictly rational conduct. The anthropologist might then ply us with more questions about (civilian) car-drivers who kill people. No doubt he would be fascinated by the intricate way in which the concepts of accident, manslaughter, chance, responsibility, mistake and intention have proliferated in our culture. The anthropologist might even conclude that we see the point of his arguments but attempt to evade their logical force by an 'ad hoc' and shifting tangle of metaphysical distinctions. In that culture, he would perhaps say, they have no practical interest in logical conclusions. They prefer their metaphysical jungle because otherwise their whole institution of punishment would be threatened"<sup>15</sup>.

Obviously, in the absence of the subsequent information provided by David Bloor, the scenario as such doesn't tell anything relevant to the case. There is no

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<sup>14</sup> David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976: 125.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*: 127.

convincing connection between the possibility of conceiving symmetrical outside assessments of two different societies and a conclusion according to which the two societies in question actually work in the same way and are managed by the same kind of thinking. The fact that the two anthropological appraisals correspond to each other is not by itself a proof that the two appraised societies can also correspond. Further considerations are made in order for the reader to withdraw the right conclusion. In David Bloor's opinion, the alien anthropologist is definitely wrong (*in a similar way that Evans-Pritchard is* – as can be read between the lines) to believe that a people would indulge in logical confusion only to preserve their institutional system intact. The truth is that we are not likely to reason in this manner in order to secure our institutions against failure under the pressure of logical criticism. Our institutions are *stable*. What we actually do is to adjust our reasoning as a result of accepting the activities of bomber pilots and car-drivers, and our critical attitude consists precisely in the fact that we are aware of the similarity between murder and other activities. Our way of thought is rather a matter of negotiation than the product of rigid logic inferences, and negotiations produce meanings. The Azande did the same thing when they tuned their thinking as a consequence of admitting that not every holder of witchcraft-substance was a witch. Their beliefs regarding witchcraft seem to be driven by the same forces as our beliefs are. Despite of the different institutions, the Zande psychology works in the same way as ours.

While David Bloor's attractive line of argument concludes in a series of reflections that can be reasonably accepted, there is a troublemaking question regarding the process of arguing for these very conclusions. One of the problems lies in the fact that the conclusions David Bloor drew can't be obtained in a compelling manner from his line of argument. There is a gap sheltered in his argumentation. Even as we are ready to accept that Western mind does operate in the manner David Bloor described, there seems to be no good enough reason to believe that the same manner could be rightly attributed to a non-Western mind. But there is something more of David Bloor's argument. David Bloor's line of reasoning can be reconstructed as follows:

- (1) A Western anthropologist (W) who investigates the Zande culture (Z) on a specific matter (M) reaches a certain result (R), in disregard of a particular distinction (D) made by the natives;
- (2) A non-Western anthropologist (~W) who investigates the Western culture (C) on a specific matter (M') analogous to M reaches the same result (R), also in disregard of a particular distinction (D') made by the natives;
- (3) An inside approach of C rejects R and arrives at a different but much more reliable result (R') which takes into account the particular distinction (D') made by the natives;
- (4) D looks similar to D'.

Therefore,

- (5) The truth regarding the specific matters M and M' could be no other than R' for both Z and C, which means that both cultures employ the same kind of thinking.

His thought experiment makes use of both etic and emic considerations. The kind of investigation pointed out at (1) and (2) is what can be labelled as an etic type of approach, while the one outlined at (3) is clearly an emic one. Despite of the mixed levels of his argument, David Bloor aims at an etic conclusion (5). However, the most important proof in order to draw the mentioned conclusion is drafted at (4). The similarity between D and D' seems to be the only fact that links the two cultures in question. But is it really a piece of evidence? To answer this question we first need to know on what basis the assertion was made.

Let us quit for the moment Bloor's argument and turn to a real anthropological experience that depicts a situation which is not far away from the one David Bloor described in his imaginary scenario.

In 1966, the American anthropologist Laura Bohannan wrote a story about a surprising cultural encounter she was involved in<sup>16</sup>. She was confident in the universality of human nature and convinced that a first-rate tragedy as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* must be endowed with transcultural relevance. Accordingly, she told the story to the Tiv elders in West Africa. Not only that the conflict was not properly understood, but the natives utterly rejected the storyteller's explanations and assigned to each dramatic event a peculiar meaning. Claudius and Gertrude behaved perfectly decent: a widow must quickly wed the younger brother of her late husband who thus becomes the father of her children. The apparition could be by no means the ghost of Hamlet's father because there are no such things as ghosts and there is no form of individual survival after death. Hamlet acted stupidly for not resorting to a sorcerer specialized in sign reading and truth finding instead of arranging that silly masquerade in order to expose his uncle. In any case, raising a hand against his own uncle is an inexcusable act; all the more that the latter became his father. The killing of Polonius was completely natural since he was so amazingly foolish not to decline his identity when asked (as experienced hunters, the natives were quick to shoot the arrow at a hidden target). If Ophelia drowned herself, there is no doubt that she became the victim of witchcraft: water as such cannot harm anyone. And so on. In their attempt to comprehend Shakespeare's story, the Tiv elders actually made up a completely new one, which the anthropologist found at least as weird as they found hers: "'Listen', said the elder, 'and I will tell you how it was and how your story will go, then you may tell me if I am right. Polonius knew his son would get into trouble, and so he did. He had many fines to pay for fighting, and debts from gambling. But he had only two ways of getting money quickly. One was to marry off his sister at once, but it is difficult to find a man who will marry a woman desired by the son of a chief. For if the chief's heir commits adultery with your wife, what can you do? Only a fool calls a case against a man who will someday be his judge. Therefore Laertes had to take the second way: he killed his sister by witchcraft, drowning her so he could secretly sell her body to the witches'". The researcher's objections and appeal to the Western way of thought were flatly discarded, and the tale was severely

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<sup>16</sup> Laura Bohannan, „Shakespeare in the bush" (1966), *Natural History* 75: 28–33.

refashioned so as to fit into Tiv cultural pattern. As to the anthropologist, she ended by being lectured on the “true” meaning of Shakespeare’s drama: “‘Sometime’, concluded the old man, gathering his ragged toga about him, ‘you must tell us some more stories of your country. We, who are elders, will instruct you in their true meaning, so that when you return to your own land your elders will see that you have not been sitting in the bush, but among those who know things and who have taught you wisdom’”.

The researcher’s universalist assumptions (or what was left of them) stumbled upon the natives’ no less universalist ones except that the Tiv didn’t admit there might be a different way of conceiving things in this world. When the story they were being told didn’t fit into their own cultural story, they promptly rectified it in order to make it plausible. On the other hand, the occurrence of a recognizable event made them believe that it was set in motion by the very same forces that drove their own cultural events. In this last respect, the Tiv, as Laura Bohannon presented them to us, seem to reason in the same way as David Bloor did. When they found that certain aspects showed themselves in both “stories”, they assumed that what works in their life story must equally work in the other. Although they were wrong in their conclusions (and we certainly know they were), we might say that they were right in what they were doing. A kind of rationality *has* to be applied in order to understand a story, and the only kind of rationality in hand was their own. The same may be said of David Bloor’s more aspiring effort to show that the Azande think like us. As I said before, what I consider to be the crucial piece in his line of reasoning is the connection he established between the two cultures (D looks similar to D’). But in linking the Zande distinction to the Western one, David Bloor assumes that both are determined by the same kind of rationality. Or, to put it in a different way, the reason for accepting his conclusion is the conclusion itself. However, David Bloor’s thought experiment confronts us with a tricky question: on what basis we assume that the familiar element we identify in another culture must be endorsed by a psychology or line of thought which is much like ours? This is a question that remains to be answered. The only honest conclusion that can be drawn from David Bloor’s thought experiment is that Zande culture can be presented in such a way as to involve no contradiction for Western thought. As Martin Hollis put it, we can identify a belief or a ritual in another culture only if it is rational according to *our criteria of rationality*<sup>17</sup>. This is to say that in any meaningful account of another culture we recognize our own standard of rationality. If we don’t, then it’s not meaningful at all. Another type of rationality is either impossible, or indiscernible.

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<sup>17</sup> Martin Hollis, „Reason and ritual” (1968), *Reason in Action. Essays in the Philosophy of Social Science*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996: 206.