CHAPTER 2

Remarks on Frazer's *The Golden Bough*

Ludwig Wittgenstein

INTRODUCTORY NOTE*

Dr. M. O'C. Drury writes: "I think it would have been in 1930 that Wittgenstein said to me that he had always wanted to read Frazer but hadn't done so, and would I get hold of a copy and read some of it out loud to him. I borrowed from the Union Library the first volume of the multivolume edition and we only got a little way through this because he talked at considerable length about it, and the next term we didn't start it again." —Wittgenstein began writing on Frazer in his manuscript book on June 19, 1931, and he added remarks during the next two or three weeks—although he was writing more about other things (such as Verstehen eines Satzes, Bedeutung, Komplex und Tatsache, Intention . . .). He may have made earlier notes in a pocket notebook, but I have found none.

* This translation is based on Rush Rhees's publication of the entire German text of Ludwig Wittgenstein's "Bemerkungen Über Frazers *The Golden Bough*" in *Synthese* 17: 233–53, 1967. Notes added in the first (abridged) translation by A. C. Miles and Rush Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein's Remarks on Frazer's The Golden Bough*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979, are marked [Miles/Rhees]; my own notes are marked [SP]. Numbers in square brackets indicate the original page breaks in the *Synthese* edition. Wittgenstein's remarks feature numbers in neither the *Synthese* version nor the first translation. They have been numbered in my translation purely for ease of reference. In the *Synthese* publication, Rhees's Introductory Note appeared in English, with the exception of the short passage in German (translated here for legibility).

It was probably in 1931 that he dictated to a typist the greater part of the manuscript books written since July 1930; often changing the order of remarks, and details of the phrasing, but leaving large blocks as they stood. (He rearranged the material again and again later on.) This particular typescript runs to 771 pages. It has a section, just under 10 pages long, of the remarks on Frazer, with a few changes in order and phrasing. Others are in different contexts, and a few are left out.

The typed section on Frazer begins with three remarks which are not connected with them in the manuscript. He had begun there with remarks which he later marked S (= "schlecht") and did not have typed. I think we can see why. The earlier version was:

> "Ich glaube jetzt, daß es richtig wäre, mein Buch mit Bemerkungen über die Metaphysik als eine Art von Magie zu beginnen.
>
> Worin ich aber weder der Magie das Wort reden noch mich über sie lustig machen darf.
>
> [234] Von der Magie müßte die Tiefe behalten werden. —
>
> Ja, das Ausschalten der Magie hat hier den Charakter der Magie selbst.
>
> Denn, wenn ich damals anfing von der 'Welt' zu reden (und nicht von diesem Baum oder Tisch), was wollte ich anderes als etwas Höheres in meine Worte bannen."
>
> ("I now believe that it would be right to begin my book with remarks on metaphysics as a kind of magic.
>
> Where, in doing so, however, I must neither speak out for magic, nor ridicule it.
>
> The depth of magic ought to be preserved. —
>
> Yes, here canceling out magic has the character of magic itself.
>
> For when I began earlier [i.e., in a prior work] to speak about the 'world' (and not of this tree or table), what else was I attempting than to conjure up something higher in my words.")

He wrote the second set of remarks—and they are only rough notes—years later; not earlier than 1936 and probably after 1948. They are written in pencil on odd bits of paper; probably he meant to insert the smaller ones in the copy of the one volume edition of *The Golden Bough* that he was using. Miss Anscombe found them among some of his things after his death.

RUSH RHEES

I

1. One must begin with error and transform it into truth.

That is, one must uncover the source of the error, otherwise hearing the truth won't help us. It cannot penetrate when something else is taking its place.

To convince someone of what is true, it is not enough to state the truth; one must find the *way* from error to truth.

Again and again I must submerge myself in the water of doubt.

Frazer's representation of human magical and religious notions is unsatisfactory: it makes these notions appear as *mistakes*.

Was Augustine mistaken, then, when he called on God on every page of the *Confessions*?

But—one might say—if he was not in error, then surely was the Buddhist saint—or whoever else—whose religion expresses entirely different notions. But none of them was in error except where he was putting forth a theory.

Already the idea of explaining the practice—say the killing of the priest king—[235] seems to me wrong-headed. All that Frazer does is to make the practice plausible to those who think like him. It is very strange to present all these practices, in the end, so to speak, as foolishness.

But it never does become plausible that people do all this out of sheer stupidity.

When he explains to us, for example, that the king would have to be killed in his prime because, according to the notions of the savages, his soul would otherwise not be kept fresh, then one can only say: where that practice and these notions go together, there the practice does not spring from the notion; instead they are simply both present.

It could well be, and often occurs today, that someone gives up a practice after having realized an error that this practice depended on. But then again, this case holds only when it is enough to make someone aware of his error so as to dissuade him from his mode of action. But surely, this is not the case with the religious practices of a people, and that is why we are *not* dealing with an error here.[1]

1. [Miles/Rhees]: Cf. *The Golden Bough*, p. 264: "But reflection and enquiry should satisfy us that to our predecessors we are indebted for much of what we thought most our own, and that their errors were not willful extravagances or the ravings

2. Frazer says it is very hard to discover the error in magic—and this is why it persists for so long—because, for example, a conjuration intended to bring about rain will sooner or later appear as effective.[2] But then it is strange that, after all, the people would not hit upon the fact that it will rain sooner or later anyway.

I believe that the enterprise of explanation is already wrong because we only have to correctly put together what one already *knows*, without adding anything, and the kind of satisfaction that one attempts to attain through explanation comes of itself.

And here it isn't the explanation at all that satisfies us. When Frazer begins by telling us the story of the King of the Woods at Nemi, he does so in a tone that shows that something strange and terrible is happening here. However, the question "Why is this happening?" is essentially answered by just this [mode of exposition]: because it is terrible. In other words, it is what appears to us a terrible, impressive, horrible, tragic, etcetera that gave birth to this event [or process].

3. [236] One can only resort to *description* here, and say: such is human life.

Compared to the impression that what is so described to us, explanation is too uncertain.

Every explanation is a hypothesis.

But someone who, for example, is unsettled by love will be ill-assisted by a hypothetical explanation. It won't calm him or her.

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of insanity, but simple hypotheses, justifiable as such at the time when they were propounded, but which fuller experience has proved to be inadequate. It is only by the successive testing of hypotheses and rejection of the false that the truth is at last elicited. After all, what we call truth is only the hypothesis that is found to work best. Therefore in reviewing the opinions and practices of ruder ages and races shall we do well to look with leniency upon their errors as inevitable slips made in the search for truth, and to give them the benefit of that indulgence that we ourselves may one day stand in need of: *cum excusatione itaque veteres audiendi sunt*."

2. [Miles/Rhees]: Cf. *The Golden Bough*, p. 59: "A ceremony intended to make the wind blow or the rain fall, or to work the death of an enemy, will always be followed, sooner or later, by the occurrence it is meant to bring to pass; and primitive man may be excused for regarding the occurrence as a direct result of the ceremony, and the best possible proof of its efficacy."

4. The crowding of thoughts that will not come out because they all try to push ahead and are wedged at the door.

5. If one sets the phrase "majesty of death" next to the story of the priest king of Nemi, one sees that they are one and the same.

The life of the priest king represents what is meant by that phrase.

Whoever is gripped by the [idea of] majesty of death can express this through just such a life. —Of course, this is also not an explanation, it just puts one symbol for another. Or one ceremony in place of another.

6. A religious symbol is not grounded in an *opinion*.

Error only corresponds to opinion.

7. One would like to say: This or the other event took place here; laugh if you can.

8. The religious actions or the religious life of the priest king are not different in kind from any genuinely religious action today, say, a confession of sins. This, too, can be "explained" and cannot be explained.

9. Burning in effigy. Kissing the picture of a loved one. This is *obviously not* based on a belief that it will have a definite effect on the object [237] that the picture represents. It aims at some satisfaction, and does achieve it, too. Or rather, it does not *aim* at anything; we act in this way and then feel satisfied.

One could also kiss the name of the loved one, and here the representation through the name [as a place-holder] would be clear.

10. The same savage who, apparently in order to kill his enemy, pierces an image of him, really builds his hut out of wood, and carves his arrow skillfully and not in effigy.

The idea that one could beckon a lifeless object to come, just as one would beckon a person. Here the principle is that of personification.

11. And magic always rests on the idea of symbolism and of language.

The representation of a wish is, eo ipso, the representation of its fulfillment.

But magic gives representation to a wish; it expresses a wish.

Baptism as washing.—An error arises only when magic is interpreted scientifically.

When the adoption of a child is carried out in a way that the mother pulls the child through her clothes, then is it not crazy to think that there is an *error*, and that she believes to have born the child.[3]

We should distinguish between magical operations and those operations that rest on false, oversimplified notions of things and processes. For instance, if one says that the illness is moving from one part of the body into another, or if one takes measures to draw off the illness as though it were a liquid or a state of heat, then one is entertaining a false, inappropriate image.

12. What narrowness of spiritual life we find in Frazer! Hence the impossibility of grasping a life different from the English one of his time!

[238] Frazer cannot imagine a priest who is not basically an English parson of our times, with all his stupidity and shallowness.

13. Why should it not be possible for someone's own name to be sacred to himself? On the one hand, it surely is the most important instrument given to him, and, on the other, it is like a jewel hung around his neck at birth.

How misleading Frazer's explanations are becomes clear, I think, from the fact that one could very well invent primitive practices oneself, and it would only be by chance if they were not actually found somewhere. That is, the principle

3. [Miles/Rhees] "The same principle of make-believe, so dear to children, has led other peoples to employ a simulation of birth as a form of adoption. . . . A woman will take a boy whom she intends to adopt and push or pull him through her clothes; ever afterward he is regarded as her very son, and inherits the whole property of his adoptive parents" (*The Golden Bough*, pp. 14, 15)

according to which these practices are ordered[4] is a much more general one than [it appears] in Frazer's explanation, and it exists in our own soul, so that we could think up all the possibilities ourselves. —We can thus readily imagine that, for instance, the king of a tribe becomes visible for no one, but also that every member of the tribe is obliged to see him. The latter will then certainly not occur in a manner more or less left to chance; instead, he will be *shown* to the people. Perhaps no one will be allowed to touch him, or perhaps they will be *compelled* to touch him. Think how after Schubert's death his brother cut Schubert's scores into small pieces and gave to his favorite pupils these pieces of a few bars. As a gesture of piety, this action is *just* as comprehensible as that of preserving the scores untouched and accessible to no one. And if Schubert's brother had burned the scores, this could still be understood as a gesture of piety.

The ceremonial (hot or cold) as opposed to the haphazard (lukewarm) is what characterizes piety.

Yes, Frazer's explanations would not be explanations at all if they did not, in the end, appeal to an inclination in ourselves.

Eating and drinking have their dangers, not only for the savage but also for us; nothing more natural than wanting to protect oneself against them; and we could think up such protective measures ourselves. —But what principle do we follow in confabulating them? Clearly that of formally reducing all dangers to a few very simple ones that are ready to see for everyone. In other words, according to the same principle that leads uneducated people in our society to say that the illness is moving from the head to the chest, etcetera, etcetera. [239] In these simple images personification will, of course, play a great role, for everyone knows that people (hence [also] spirits) can become dangerous to others.

That a human shadow, which looks like a human being, or one's mirror image, that rain, thunderstorms, the phases of the moon, the change of seasons, the likeness or difference of animals to one another and to human beings, the phenomenon of death, of birth, and of sexual life, in short, everything that a human being senses around himself, year in, year out, in manifold mutual connection—that all this should play a role in the thought of human beings (their

4. [Miles/Rhees] That is, how they stand related to one another and what this depends on.

philosophy) and in their practices is self-evident; or, in other words, it is what we really know and find interesting.[5]

How could the fire or the fire's resemblance to the sun have failed to make an impression on the awakening mind of man? But not perhaps "because he can't explain it to himself" (the stupid superstition of our time)—for does an "explanation" make it less impressive?—

The magic in *Alice in Wonderland*, trying to dry out by reading the driest thing there is.[6]

14. In magical healing one *indicates* to the illness that it should leave the patient.

After the description of such a magical cure one wants to say, If the illness doesn't understand *that*, then I don't know *how* else to tell it [to do so].

15. I do not mean that it is especially *fire* that must make an impression on anyone. Fire no more than any other phenomenon, and one will impress this person and another that. For no phenomenon is particularly mysterious in itself, but any of them can become so to us, and it is precisely the characteristic feature of the awakening human mind that a phenomenon acquires significance for it. One could almost say that man is a ceremonial animal. This is probably partly false, partly nonsensical, but there is also some truth to it.

In other words, one could begin a book on anthropology in this way: when one observes the life and behavior of humans all over the earth, one sees that apart from the kinds of behavior one could call animal [240], the intake of food, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, humans also carry out actions that bear a peculiar character, and might be called ritual actions.

But then again, it is nonsense to go on and say that the characteristic feature of these actions is that they spring from erroneous notions about the physics of things. (As Frazer does when he says that magic is really false physics, or as the case may be, false medicine, technology, etc.)

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5. [Miles/Rhees, both in German and English] In another part of the manuscript, Wittgenstein wrote: "It never occurs to humans on what foundations their inquiries really rest. Unless, that is, *this* has, at some point, occurred to them (Frazer, etc., etc.)."
6. [Miles/Rhees] Chapter III, the remark of the mouse.

Rather, what is characteristic of ritual action is not at all any view, opinion, be it right or wrong, although an opinion—a belief—can itself be of ritual nature, or belong to a rite.

16. If one takes it to be self-evident that people take pleasure in their own imaginations, then one should remember that such imagination is not like a picture or a three-dimensional model, but a complicated pattern of heterogeneous components: words and images. [Once one does so] one will then no longer oppose operating with written or acoustic signs to operating with "mental images" of events.

17. We must plow over language in its entirety.

18. Frazer: ". . . That these operations are dictated by fear of the ghost of the slain seems certain . . ." [p.212]. But why does Frazer use the word "ghost"?[7] He thus evidently understands this superstition only too well, since he explains it with a superstitious term familiar to him. Or rather, he could have seen from this that there is something in us, too, that speaks in support of such observances on the part of the savages. —When I, who do not believe that there exist, anywhere, human-superhuman beings whom one can call gods—when I say: "I fear the wrath of the gods," then this shows that I can mean something with this [utterance], or can express a sentiment that is not necessarily connected with such belief.

19. Frazer seems capable of believing that a savage dies out of error. In the elementary school primers it says that Attila undertook his great campaigns because he believed he possessed the sword of the god of thunder.

[241] Frazer is far more savage than most of his savages, for these savages will not be as far removed from an understanding of spiritual matters as an Englishman of the twentieth century.[8] His explanations of primitive practices are much cruder than the meaning of these practices themselves.

7. [SP] "Ghost" appears in English in the original.
8. [SP] "Savage" appears in English in the original.

20. A historical explanation, an explanation in the form of a hypothesis of development is only *one* kind of summary arrangement of the data—of their synopsis. It is equally possible to see the data in their relation to one another and to gather them into a general picture without doing so in the form of a hypothesis concerning temporal development.

21. Identification of one's own gods with the gods of other peoples. One convinces oneself that the names have the same meaning.

22. "And so the chorus points to a secret law" is what one might want to say about Frazer's collection of facts. Now, I *can* represent this law, this idea, in the form of a hypothesis of development,[9] but also in analogy to the schema of a plant, I can represent it as the schema of a religious ceremony, or again by grouping the facts alone in a "perspicuous" presentation.

For us the concept of perspicuous presentation is of fundamental importance.[10] It designates our form of presentation, the way we see things. (A kind of "Weltanschauung" as it is apparently typical of our time. Spengler.)

This perspicuous presentation transmits an understanding of the kind that what we see are "just the connections." Hence the importance of finding *intermediate links*.

However, in this case, a hypothetical link is not meant to do anything other than draw attention to the similarity, the connection between the *facts*. Just as one

9. [Miles/Rhees] Or evolution.

10. [SP] In their translation, Miles and Rhees add a parenthesis in the English text at this point. It reads as follows: "A way of setting out the whole field together by making easy the passage from one part of it to another." "Introduced in translation, not in Wittgenstein's text. His word is 'übersichtlich.' He uses this constantly in writing of logical notation and of mathematical proof, and it is clear what he means. So we ought to have an English word. We have put "perspicuous" here, too. But no one uses this in English either. Perhaps a reader with more flexible wrists will hit on something." In fact, "übersichtlich" is a term that has notoriously vexed Anglophone commentators on the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, since it not only has no lexical equivalent in English but also because Wittgenstein's use of the term in German remains open to interpretation (as his own quotation marks already indicate).

might illustrate an inner relation between a circle and an ellipse by gradually transforming an ellipse into a circle; *but not to claim that a given ellipse in fact, historically, emerged from a circle* (developmental [242] hypothesis[11]), rather only to sharpen our eye for a formal connection.

But I also cannot see the developmental hypothesis as anything but the investiture [clothing] of a formal connection.

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23. [In the manuscript, the following remarks are not grouped with the ones above:][12]

I would like to say: nothing shows our kinship to those savages better than the fact that Frazer has at hand a word as familiar to us as "ghost" or "shade"[13] to describe the views of these people.

(For this surely is something different from what it would be if he were to describe, say, how the savages imagined that their heads would fall off when they have slain an enemy; in this case, *our description* would have nothing superstitious or magical about it.)

Yes, the strangeness of this relates not only to the expressions "ghost" and "shade,"[14] and far too little is made of the fact that we count the words "soul" [*Seele*] and "spirit" [*Geist*] into our own civilized vocabulary. Compared to this, it is a minor detail that we do not believe that our soul eats and drinks.

24. A whole mythology is deposited in our language.

25. Casting out death or slaying death; but on the other hand he is also represented as a skeleton, as if he were in some sense dead himself. "As dead

11. [Miles/Rhees] Or evolution.
12. [SP] This bracketed remark appears in Wittgenstein's *Remarks*. Miles and Rhees add the following in the translation: "[The remarks up to this point form the 'selection' Wittgenstein had typed as though forming a separate essay. The passages that follow now were not included in this, although they come—at various points—in the same large manuscript and in the revision and typing of it]."
13. [SP] Both "ghost" and "shade" appear in English in the original.
14. [SP] Both "ghost" and "shade" appear in English in the original.

as death."[15] "Nothing is so dead as death; nothing is so beautiful as beauty herself."[16] Here the image used in thinking of reality is that beauty, death, etcetera are the pure (concentrated) substances, and that they are present in a beautiful object as an admixture. —And do I not recognize here my own observations on "object" and "complex"?[17]

26. What we have in the ancient rites is the use of a highly cultivated gestural language.

And when I read Frazer, I keep wanting to say at every step: All these processes, these changes of meaning [243] are still present to us in our word language. If what is called the "corn-wolf" is what is hidden in the last sheaf, but [if this name applies] also to the last sheaf itself and the man who binds it, then we recognize in this a linguistic process with which we are perfectly familiar.[18]

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27. I could imagine that I might have had to choose some being on earth as my soul's dwelling place, and that my spirit had chosen this unsightly creature as its seat and vantage point. Perhaps because the exception of a beautiful dwelling would repel him. Of course, for the spirit to do so, he would have to be very sure of himself.[19]

28. One could say "every view has its charm," but that would be wrong. What is correct is that every view is significant for whoever sees it so (but that

15. [SP] English in the original.
16. [SP] "Death" (*der Tod*) takes masculine grammatical gender in German, "beauty" (*die Schönheit*), feminine.
17. [Miles/Rhees] In *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung*), first published 1921.
18. [Miles/Rhees] "In various parts of Mecklenburg, where the belief in the Corn-Wolf is particularly prevalent, everyone fears to cut the last corn, because they say the Wolf is sitting in it; . . . the last bunch of corn is itself commonly called the Wolf, and the man who reaps it . . . is himself called Wolf" (*The Golden Bough*, p. 449).
19. [SP] Miles and Rhees vacillate here between masculine and neutral grammatical gender, variously referring to *spirit* as both "he" and "it."

does not mean one sees it as something other than it is). Indeed, in this sense every view is equally significant.

Yes, it is important that I must make my own even anyone's contempt for me, as an essential and significant part of the world seen from my vantage point.

29. If a human being were free to choose to be born in a tree in the forest, then there would be some who would seek out the most beautiful or highest tree for themselves, some who would choose the smallest, and some who would choose an average or below-average tree, and I do not mean out of philistinism, but for just the reason, or the kind of reason for which someone else chose the highest. That the feeling we have for our life is comparable to that of a being that could choose its standpoint in the world has, I believe, its basis in the myth—or belief—that we choose our bodies before birth.

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30. I believe the characteristic feature of primitive man is that he does not act on the basis of opinions (as Frazer thinks).

31. I read, among many similar examples, of a rain-king in Africa to whom the people appeal for rain *when the rainy season comes*.[20] [244] But surely this does not mean that they actually think he can make rain, for otherwise they would do it in the dry periods of the year when the land is "a parched and arid desert."[21] For if one assumes that the people originally

20. [Miles/Rhees—possibly Wittgenstein himself] "The Kings of the Rain, *Mata Kodou*, who are credited with the power of giving rain at the proper time; that is, in the rainy season. Before the rain begins to fall at the end of March, the country is a parched and arid desert; and the cattle, which form the people's chief wealth, perish for lack of grass. So, when the end of March draws on, each householder betakes himself to the King of Rain and offers him a cow so that he can make the blessed waters of heaven drip on the brown and withered pastures" (*The Golden Bough*, p. 107).

21. [SP] English in the original.

> instituted the office of the rain-king out of stupidity, it certainly still is clear that they would have previously made the experience that the rains commence in March, and they could have let the rain-king perform his work during the other parts of the year. Or again: toward morning, when the sun is about to rise, people celebrate rites of daybreak, but not at night, for then they simply burn lamps.

When I am angry about something, I sometimes hit the ground or a tree with my cane. But surely, I do not believe that the ground is at fault or that the hitting would help matters. "I vent my anger." And all rites are of this kind. One can call such practices instinctual behavior. —And a historical explanation, for instance that I or my ancestors earlier believed that hitting the ground would help, is mere shadow-boxing, for these [*sic*] are superfluous assumptions that explain *nothing*. What is important is the semblance of the practice to an act of punishment, but more than this semblance cannot be stated.

Once such a phenomenon is brought into relation with an instinct that I possess myself, it thus constitutes the desired explanation; that is, one that resolves this particular difficulty. And further investigation of the history of my instinct now proceeds along different tracks.

32. It could have been no insignificant reason—that is, no *reason* at all—for which certain races of man came to venerate the oak tree other than that they and the oak were united in a community of life, so that they came into being not by choice, but jointly, like the dog and the flea (were fleas to develop a ritual, it would relate to the dog).

One might say, it was not their union (of oak trees and humans) that occasioned these rites, but, in a certain sense, their separation.

[245] For the awakening of intellect goes along with the separation from the original *soil*, the original ground of life. (The origin of *choice*.)

(The form of the awakening mind is veneration.)

II

33. P. 168.[22] (At a certain stage of early society the king or priest is often thought to be endowed with supernatural powers or to be an incarnation of a deity, and consistently with this belief the course of nature is supposed to be more or less under his control . . .)

It is of course not the case that the people believe that the ruler has these powers while the ruler himself very well knows that he does not have them, or does not know so only if he is an idiot or fool. Rather, the notion of his power is of course arranged in a way such that it corresponds with experience—his own and that of the people. That any kind of hypocrisy plays a role in this is only true to the extent that it suggests itself in most of what humans do anyway.

34. P. 169. (In ancient times he was obliged to sit on the throne for some hours every morning, with the imperial crown on his head, but to sit altogether like a statue, without stirring either hands or feet, head or eyes, nor indeed any part of his body, because, by this means, it was thought that he could preserve peace and tranquility in his empire . . .)

When someone in our (or at least my) society laughs too much, I press my lips together in an almost involuntary fashion, as if I believed I could thereby keep his lips closed.

35. P. 170. (The power of giving or withholding rain is ascribed to him, and he is lord of the winds . . .)

What is nonsensical here is that Frazer presents it as if these people had an entirely wrong (indeed, insane) notion of the course of nature, while they really only entertain a somewhat peculiar interpretation of the phenomena. That is, if they wrote it down, their knowledge of nature would not be *fundamentally* different from ours. Only their *magic* is different.

22. [SP] The paragraphs beginning with page numbers are quotations (in English) from the 1922 one-volume edition of the *Golden Bough*.

36. [246] P. 171. ". . . a network of prohibitions and observances, of which the intention is not to contribute to his dignity . . ." This is both true and false. Of course not the dignity of the protection of the person but rather—as it were—the natural sacredness of the divinity in him.

37. Simple though it may sound: The difference between magic and science can be expressed in the way that there is progress in science, but not in magic. Magic possesses no direction of development internal to itself.

38. P. 179. (The Malays conceive the human soul as a little man . . . who corresponds exactly in shape, proportion, and even in complexion to the man in whose body he resides . . .)

How much more truth in granting the soul the same multiplicity as the body than in a watered-down modern theory.

Frazer does not realize that what we are facing here are the teachings of Plato and Schopenhauer.

We re-encounter all childish (infantile) theories in contemporary philosophy; only without the charm of childishness.

39. P. 614.[23] (In Chapter LXII, "The Fire Festivals of Europe")

What is most striking are not merely the similarities but also the differences between all these rites. There is a manifold of faces with common features that keep surfacing here and there. And what one would like to do is draw lines that connect the components in common. What would still be lacking then is a part of our contemplation, and it is the one that connects this picture with our own feelings and thoughts. This part gives such contemplation its depth.

40. In all these practices, however, one sees something related or akin to the association of ideas. One could speak of an association of practices.

23. [SP] The Miles/Rhees edition gives this reference as p. 617ff.

P. 618. (. . . So soon as any sparks were emitted by means of the violent [247] friction, they applied a species of agaric, which grows on old birch trees and is very combustible. This fire had the appearance of being immediately derived from heaven, and manifold were the virtues ascribed to it . . .)

41. Nothing speaks for why fire should be surrounded with such a nimbus. And what an odd thing [to say], "it had the appearance of being derived from heaven." What does this actually mean? From what heaven? No, it is not at all self-evident that fire is regarded in this way—but that is how it is regarded.[24]

The person who officiated as master of the feast produced a large cake baked with eggs and scalloped round the edge, called *am bonnach bealtine*—that is, the Beltane cake. It was divided into a number of pieces, and distributed in great form to the company. There was one particular piece that whoever got was called *cailleach beal-tine*—that is, the Beltane *carline*, a term of great reproach. Upon this being known, part of the company laid hold of him and made a show of putting him in the fire. . . . And while the feast was fresh in people's memory, they affected to speak of the *cailleach beal-tine* as dead. (*The Golden Bough*, p. 618)

42. Here it appears as though it were only the hypothesis that gives the matter depth. And then one may remember the explanation of the strange relationship between Siegfried and Brunhild in our *Nibelungenlied*. Namely, that Siegfried seems to have seen Brunhilde [*sic*] some time before. It is thus clear that what gives this practice depth is its *connection* with the burning of a human being. If it were custom at some festival for men to ride on one another (as in horse-and-ride games), we would see nothing more in this than a way of carrying someone, which reminds us of people riding horses; —however, if we knew that it had been custom among many peoples to, for example, use slaves as mounts and to celebrate certain festivals mounted in this way, then we should see in the harmless practice of our times something deeper and less harmless. The question is: Does this—shall we say—sinister character adhere to the custom of the Beltane

24. The following quotation from Frazer is omitted in the *Synthese* edition, but appears in the Miles/Rhees edition.

> fire in itself as it was practiced a hundred years ago, or only if the hypothesis of its origin were to be confirmed? I believe that what appears to us as sinister is the inner nature of the practice as performed in recent times, and the facts of human sacrifice as we know them only indicate the direction in which we ought to look at it. When I speak of the inner nature of the practice, I mean all of those circumstances in which it is carried out and that are not included in the report on such a festival, because they consist not so much in particular actions that characterize the festival than in what one might call the spirit of the festival that would be described, for example, if one were to describe the kind of people that take part in it, their usual way of behaving [on other occasions]—that is, their character—and the kind of games they play at other times. And then one would see that what is sinister lies in the character of these people themselves.[25]

In . . . western Perthshire, the Beltane custom was still en vogue toward the end of the eighteenth century. It has been described as follows by the parish minister of the time [248]: "They put all the bits of the cake into a bonnet. Every one, blindfold, draws out a portion. . . . Whoever draws the black bit is the *devoted* person who is to be sacrificed to *Baal* . . ."

Thomas Pennant, who traveled in northern Perthshire in the year 1769, tells us that "everyone takes a cake of oatmeal upon which are raised nine square knobs, each dedicated to some particular being . . ."

Another writer of the eighteenth century has described the Beltane festival as it was held in the parish of Logierait in Perthshire. He says: "These dishes they eat with a sort of cake baked for the occasion, and having small lumps in the form of *nipples*, raised all over the surface." We may conjecture that the cake with knobs was formerly used for the purpose of determining who should be the "Beltane carline" or victim doomed to the flames (*The Golden Bough*, pp. 618, 619).

43. Here one sees something like the remnants of a casting of lots. And through this aspect it suddenly gains depth. Should we learn that the cake with the buttons [i.e., "knobs," a mistranslation on Wittgenstein's part] was originally baked in a determinate case, say, in honor of a button-maker

25. [SP] The following three quotes from Frazer's *Golden Bough* do not appear in the *Synthese* edition of the German original, but only in the Miles/Rhees translation.

on the occasion of his birthday, and that the practice had then merely persisted on a local level, it would in fact lose all its "depth," unless this were to lie in its present form as such. But in this case, it is often said: "this custom is obviously ancient." How does one know that? Is it merely because historical evidence for ancient practices of this sort is at hand? Or is there another reason, one that we can attain through interpretation? But even if its prehistoric origin and its descent from an earlier practice is historically established, then it is still possible that today there is *nothing at all* sinister about the practice anymore, that nothing of the ancient horror still adheres to it. Perhaps it is only performed by children today who have contests in baking cakes and decorating them with buttons. If so, then the depth would thus only lie in the thought of such ancestry. Yet this can very well be uncertain and one feels like saying: "Why worry about something so uncertain" (like a backward-looking Kluge Else).[26] But worries of that kind are not involved here. —Above all: whence the certainty that such a practice must be ancient (what are the data, what is the verification)? But have we any certainty, could we not be mistaken and proven to be in error by historical means? Certainly, but there still remains something of which we are sure. We would then say: "Very well, in this case the origin may be different, but in general it is surely ancient." What constitutes *evidence* for us of this must entail the depth of this assumption. And this evidence, again, is nonhypothetical, psychological. For when I say: what is deep about this lies in its origin *if it did* come about in this way, then such deepness lies either in the thought of [its derivation from] such origins, or else the deepness is in itself hypothetical—in which case one can only say: if that is how it went, then this was a deep and sinister [249] business. What I want to say is this: what is sinister, deep [about all this] does not lie in how the history of this practice actually went, for perhaps it did not go that way at all; nor that it maybe or [even] probably went that way, but in what gives me reason to assume so. What makes human sacrifice so deep and sinister in the first place? For is it only the suffering of the victim that impresses us thus? All manners of illnesses bring about just as much suffering, and yet do not evoke this impression. No, this deep and sinister aspect does not become self-evident just from our knowledge of the history of the external actions; rather, we impute it to them [reintroduce it into them] on the basis of an inner experience of our own.

26. [SP] Wittgenstein is referring to a character in one of the Grimm brothers' tales.

The fact that a cake is utilized in drawing the lots does have something especially horrible (almost like betrayal through a kiss), and that this would impress us as so horrible is, again, of essential importance for the investigation of such practices.

When I see such a practice, or hear of it, it is like seeing a man who speaks sternly to another for trivial reasons, and noticing from the tone of his voice and his demeanor that on a given occasion this man can be scary. The impression I get from this can be a very deep and extraordinarily sinister one.

44. The *environment* of a way of acting.

45. A conviction, at any rate, underlies the speculations about the origins of, for example, the Beltane festival; namely that such festivals were not, as it were, haphazardly invented, but would have to have an infinitely broader basis in order to persist. If I were to invent a festival, it would die out very soon, or else be so modified that it would correspond to a general inclination among the people.

However, what is it that militates against assuming that the Beltane would have always been celebrated in its present (or very recent) form? One feels like saying: it is too senseless to have been invented in this way. Is it not like when I see a ruin and say: that must have been a house once, for no one would erect a heap like that [250] of hewn and irregular stones? And if it be asked: How do you know that? Then I could only say: it is what my experience of humans teaches me. Indeed, even when they build ruins, they derive the form from collapsed houses.

One might put it this way: Anyone who wanted to impress us with the story of the Beltane festival would not have to express the hypothesis of its origin; he would only have to show us the material (which led to the hypothesis) and say nothing more. Here one might perhaps want to say, "Of course, this is so because the listeners or readers will draw the conclusion for themselves!" But must they draw the conclusion explicitly? That is, draw it at all? And what conclusion is it [anyway]? That this or that is *probable*? And if they can draw the conclusions themselves, how should the conclusions impress them? What makes for the impression must surely be what they have *not* done! Is what causes the

impression the hypothesis once expressed (by them or whomever) or already the material itself? But could I not just as well ask in this case: When I see someone being killed, is it simply what I see that impresses me, or does this impression [only] arise from the hypothesis that someone is being killed here?

But it is obviously not just the idea of the possible origins of the Beltane festival that conveys the impression, but what one calls the immense probability of this idea. All that is derived from the material [itself].

The Beltane festival as it has come down to us is indeed a play, and as such it is similar to children playing at robbers. But then again, it is not like this. For even if it is prearranged that the side that saves the victims wins, there is still, in what eventuates, an affective addition that a mere theatrical performance does not have. But even if it merely were a rather cool performance, would we not anxiously ask ourselves: What is this performance aiming at, what is its *meaning*? And apart from any interpretation, its strange pointlessness could unsettle us (which shows what the reason behind such uneasiness can be). Suppose some harmless interpretation were to be given: perhaps the lot is cast for reasons of the entertainment derived from being able to threaten someone to be thrown into the fire, which would be disagreeable; then the Beltane festival becomes far more like [251] those practical jests in which a member of the company has to endure certain cruelties that, such as they are, satisfy a certain need, in just this form. Through such an explanation, the Beltane festival would lose all mystery, were it not for the fact that it deviates in action and mood from such common games of robbers, etcetera.

Just so, the fact that children may, on certain days, burn a straw man could make us uneasy, even if no explanation were to come forth. How strange that a *man* should be burned by them in celebration! What I want to say is this: The solution is not anymore disquieting than the riddle.

But why should it not really be (partly, anyway) just the *idea* that makes the impression on me? Aren't ideas frightening? Can I not feel horror at the thought that the cake with the buttons once served to select the victim of [human] sacrifice? Hasn't that [very] *thought* something terrible to it? —Yes, but what I see in these stories is something that they acquire, after all, from the evidence, including such evidence as does not seem to be directly connected to them—[they acquire it] through the thought of humans and their past, through

all the strangeness of what I see in myself and in others, and what I have seen and heard about it.[27]

46. P. 640. (?) One can very well imagine this—and the reason might have been given that the patron saints would otherwise be at cross-purposes, and that only one of them could direct the matter. But this, too, would only be a belated extension of the instinct.

All these *various* practices show that we are not dealing with the descent of one from the other, but with a commonality of spirit. And one could invent (confabulate) all of these ceremonies on one's own. And the spirit in which one would invent them is their common one.

47. P. 641. (. . . as soon as the fire on the domestic hearth had been rekindled from the need-fire, a pot full of water was set on it, and water thus heated was afterward sprinkled upon the people infected with the plague or upon the cattle that were tainted by the murrain.)

[252] The connection of illness and dirt. "The cleansing of a disease."

It is a simple, childlike theory of disease that it is the dirt that could be washed off.

Just like there are "infantile theories of sexuality," there are infantile theories more generally. However, this does not mean that everything that a child does has come *from* an infantile theory as its reason.

The correct and interesting thing is not to say, "this has come from that," but "it could have come from that."

P. 643. (. . . Dr. Westermark has argued powerfully in favor of the purificatory theory alone. . . . However, the case is not so clear as to justify us in dismissing the solar theory without discussion.)

27. [SP] The following paragraphs only appear in the *Synthese* edition. They were omitted in the Miles/Rhees translation.

That fire was used for cleansing is clear. But nothing can be more likely than that thoughtful people would have eventually associated cleansing ceremonies with the sun, even when they were originally conceived just as such. When a thought suggests itself to a person (fire-cleansing) and another to someone else (fire-sun) then what can be more likely than that both thoughts will suggest themselves to one person. The scholars who always want to have a theory!!!

The *total* destruction through fire, different from smashing or tearing up, must have been noticed by people.

Even if one didn't know anything of such a connection between the thought of cleansing and the sun, one could assume that it would have occurred somewhere.

48. P. 680. (. . . in New Britain there is a secret society. . . . On his entrance into it every man receives a stone in the shape either of a human being or of an animal, and henceforth his soul is believed to be knit up in a manner with the stone.)

[253] "Soul-stone."[28] Here one sees how such a hypothesis works.

49. P. 681. ([680 infra, 681] . . . it used to be thought that the maleficent powers of witches and wizards resided in their hair, and that nothing could make any impression on these miscreants so long as they kept their hair on. Hence in France it was customary to shave the whole bodies of persons charged with sorcery before handing them over to the torturer.)

This would indicate that this is grounded in a truth rather than in superstition. (Of course it is easy to fall into a spirit of contestation [contradiction] when facing the stupid scholar). But it can very well be that the body entirely shorn of hair leads us in some sense to lose self-respect. (Brothers Karamazoff.) There is no doubt whatsoever that a mutilation that makes us look undignified, ludicrous in our own eyes can rob us of all will to defend ourselves. How embarrassed we are sometimes—or at least many people (I)—by our physical or aesthetic inferiority.

28. English in the original.