

# Preconquest Consciousness

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from *Tribal Epistemologies: Essays in the Philosophy of Anthropology*, Helmut Wautischer, ed.

## Precursory Considerations

**Anthropology as an epistemological problem.** Most anthropologists are aware that what comprise the standard habits, inclinations, and activities of humankind in one culture may seem quite exotic in another. When the separateness of peoples is extreme, incompatible modes of awareness and cognition sometimes arise, as occurred between the preconquest and postconquest eras of the world. Basic sensibilities, including sense-of-identity and sense-of-truth, were so contradistinctive in these two eras that they were irreconcilable. Even core features of life in one era were imperceptible to people in the other. While such disparate cognitive separation may be rare, a single occurrence is sufficient to make anthropology an epistemological problem.

**Epistemology as an anthropological problem.** Moreover, when irreconcilable modes of cognition emerge within humankind, it becomes more obvious that sense-of-truth is the product of mental evolution within a particular cultural framework. Epistemology may well be a noetic discipline, but it also emerged as a cultural phenomenon from the early Western process of civilization in the Mediterranean Basin. As a product of culture, it becomes a subject for anthropological inquiry.

**The quandary.** When epistemology and anthropology each become a problem of the other, an inquiry oscillation emerges that befuddles thought in direct proportion to one's adherence to these modes of inquiry. The existence of such a conundrum reveals the need for inquiries into truth that are not beholden to the sense-of-truth of any one particular culture.

## The Preconquest Setting

The preconquest type of consciousness detailed below survives today only in a few, now rapidly vanishing, isolated enclaves. Although those we contacted were widely dispersed, they shared a distinctive type of consciousness—one very different from the postconquest type that dominates the world today. It emerged from a type of child and infant nurture common to that era but shunned in ours.

The outstanding demographic condition required for such a life is small populations surrounded by tracts of open territory

into which anyone can diffuse virtually at will. This allows those discomfited by local circumstance, or attracted by conditions further on, to move as they wish with whoever might be similarly inclined. This was the case even in the smallest of all the preconquest enclaves seen. The outstanding social condition is a sociosensual type of infant and child nurture that spawns an intuitive group rapport and unites people without need for formal rules. The outstanding psychological condition is heart-felt rapprochement based on integrated trust. This provides remarkable efficiency in securing needs and responding to nature's challenges while dispensing ongoing delight with people and surroundings.<sup>1</sup>

The outstanding economic condition is absence of private property, which allows constant cooperative usage of the implements and materials of life for collective benefit. The human ecology engendered by the interaction of these outstanding conditions makes the forcing of others (including children) to one's will a disruptive and unwholesome practice. It was not seen.

Any form of subjugation, even those barriers to freedom imposed by private property, are the kiss of death to this type of life. Though durable and self-repairing in isolation, the unconditional open trust this way of life requires shrivels with alarming speed when faced with harsh emotions or coercion. Deceit, hostility, and selfishness when only episodic temporarily benumb intuitive rapport. When such conditions come to stay and no escape is possible, intuitive rapport disintegrates within a brutally disorienting period of existential trauma and anomie. With no other models about except those of conquerors, a 'savage-savage' emerges from the wreckage of a once 'noble-savage'.<sup>2</sup> These more brutal beings adjust to the postconquest milieu by adopting formal group identities. First they internalize various abstract ideas of space, boundary and kinship introduced by their conquerors. They then use them to anchor claims of their own to turf. They devise rules and customs that clearly identify them as a distinct people with formal rights. From this process different kinds of cultural elaboration emerge in separated regions—until a harsher level of conquest presses their uniqueness to extinction.

This preconquest type of life, and its transformation, came to light unsought and unexpectedly during a comparative study

of child behavior and human development in cultural isolates. It was encountered among such peoples as: Neolithic hunter-gatherer-gardeners in the Central Range of New Guinea; pagan Sea Nomads in the Eastern Sea of Andaman off southern Burma and Thailand; maritime nomads in the Sulu Sea between Borneo and the Philippines; isolated ocean-going fisherfolk in southern India; nomadic hunter-gatherers in Tamil Nadu, India; subsistence agriculturists (Tharu and Tamang, but less so Jyapu) in Nepal; forest nomads (Sikai) in the interior mountains of the Malay Peninsula on the Malaysia-Thailand border; Negrito hunter-gatherer-gardeners in interior mountains of Negros Island in the Philippines; hunter-gatherer-gardeners (Mbotgate) in the central rain forests of Vanuatu's Malekula Island; nomadic Tibetan herders of the Changthang Plateau; subsistence Micronesian atoll dwellers in traditional outliers of the Western Caroline Islands, the remote Polynesian population on Ono-i-Lau; and in isolated American Indian enclaves in Mexico and South America. Vestigial aspects of prequest life were seen in segregated urban ghettos in Asia and Oceania. Early accounts suggest that traditional Eskimos and many North American Indian tribes possessed similar traits. The Yequana Indians of Venezuela clearly did.<sup>3</sup>

Most groups seen were in secluded, obscure areas. Where governments were taking charge, the prequest type of consciousness tended to survive only in isolated fringe refuges. In New Guinea, the type was seen in finest fettle in the remotest, most isolated clusters of hunter-gatherer-gardeners verging into vast regions of uninhabited virgin rainforest at the time of civilized contact. There, despite the seemingly incessant rain, the always densely saturated air, the insular remoteness, and the absence of anything resembling modern amenities or comfort, life exuded a most remarkable, on-the-mark intuitive helpfulness and a constant considerate regard by each for all the others. These extended not just to associates and friends but to strangers too. Long before we shared a single word of any common language (indeed, in my first hours there), these forest-dwellers had instinctively tuned in to my feelings and made life easier and happier for me.

Among the Canela Indians in Brazil, the relaxed sociosensual camaraderie characteristic of prequest rapport was seen only in the remote agricultural outliers, away from the central village. This was so, as well, for the Sikai forest nomads in the central mountains of the Malay Peninsula. In the Andaman and Sulu Seas, empathetic intuitive rapport manifested in exquisite form only among Sea Nomads roaming remote areas of their reef and isle bespattered domain. Ensconced within archaic hand-hewn houseboats, they steadfastly and deliberately avoided areas breached by settlement or commerce. Empathetic, integrative, intuitive rapport manifested itself in particularly high form among those who

carefully avoided regions penetrated by commerce and settlement as they circulated their nomadic domain. In the Himalayas (Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan) it was most evident among small, isolated subsistence populations in remote regions that were difficult to access.

Prequest regions were often fringed by intervening zones of mayhem and disorder, including warfare, piracy, extravagant sexuality, and brigandage. Getting through to them was often dangerous.

Groups only lightly touched by aggressive cultures retained much of their basic sociosensual child nurture and instinctive intuitive rapport. These core traits declined as the force of conquest increased. In the face of sustained demanding contact, open sociosensuality largely disappeared from view, to reshape as a confined covert type (seen inside houses, at sea on boats, in obscure nooks, and in isolated social fringes). Where prequest populations were unrelentingly besieged by harsh conquistadorial demands, intuitive rapport sometimes suddenly give way en masse, precipitating a period of acute existential crisis. Arising from such crises was the 'savage-savage' who caused much of the mayhem and disorder seen in those disturbed and dangerous zones that so often barricaded entrance to remnant prequest areas.<sup>4</sup>

## **Liminal Awareness**

Most of us know about subliminal awareness—the type of awareness lurking below actual consciousness that powerfully influences behavior. Freud brought it into the mainstream of Western thought through exhaustively detailed revelations of its effects on behavior. But few, including Freud, have spoken of liminal consciousness, which is therefore rarely recognized in modern scholarship as a separate type of awareness. Nonetheless, liminal awareness was the principal focus of mentality in the prequest cultures contacted, whereas a supraliminal type that focuses logic on symbolic entities is the dominant form in postquest societies.<sup>5</sup>

Liminally focused consciousness is very different from the supraliminal type that has almost entirely replaced it. Within the prequest cultures observed basic sensibilities (such as of identity, number, space, and truth) shape up in unexpected ways. So does human integration. Prequest groups are simultaneously individualistic and collective—traits immiscible and incompatible in modern thought and languages. This fusion of individuality and solidarity is another of the profound cognitive disparities that separate the prequest and postquest eras. It in part explains why even fundamental prequest cultural traits are sometimes difficult to perceive, much less to appreciate, by postquest peoples.

From the Latin language underlying our Western heritage we can understand that liminal awareness, by definition, occurs on the threshold of consciousness. This concept, though abstract, provides a useful term. In the real life of these preconquest people, feeling and awareness are focused on at-the-moment, point-blank sensory experience—as if the nub of life lay within that complex flux of collective sentient immediacy. Into that flux individuals thrust their inner thoughts and aspirations for all to see, appreciate, and relate to. This unabashed open honesty is the foundation on which their highly honed integrative empathy and rapport become possible. When that openness gives way, empathy and rapport shrivel. Where deceit becomes a common practice, they disintegrate.

Where consciousness is focused within a flux of ongoing sentient awareness, experience cannot be clearly subdivided into separable components. With no clear elements to which logic can be applied, experience remains immune to syntax and formal logic within a kaleidoscopic sanctuary of non-discreteness. Nonetheless, preconquest life was reckoned sensibly—though seemingly intuitively.

With preconquest consciousness largely unencumbered by abstract concepts, it remained unconstrained by formal categories of value and cognition (i.e., rules and stable cognitive entities). Only when awareness shifted from liminal to supraliminal did the notion of ‘correctness’ become a matter of concern—e.g., behaving ‘properly,’ having ‘right’ answers, wearing ‘appropriate’ clothes, etc. ‘Improper’ aspirations, inclinations, and desires were then masked as people tried to measure up to the ‘proper’ rule and standard. They used rhetoric and logic argumentatively with reference to norms, precedents, and agreements to gain and maintain dignity, status, and position. It was an altogether different world from that of the preconquest era where people freely spread their interests, feelings, and delights out for all to see and grasp as they lurched toward whatever delightful patterns of response they found attractive.

## Spawning Preconquest Consciousness

Preconquest mentality emerged from a sociosensual infant nurture common to its era but shunned in ours. When I first went into those isolated hamlets in the deep New Guinea forests I was dumbfounded by the lush sensuality of infant care I saw in the southern reaches of what the new Australian administration called ‘South Fore’.<sup>6</sup>

This type of nurture was studied in greatest detail among the New Guinea forest-dwelling hunter-gatherer-gardeners on the southern slopes of the Kratke Range just after Western contact in the early 1960s. They provided the initial model for liminal

consciousness. Bordering them to the north were people whose adoption of sweet potato as their staple was despoiling forest lands and undercutting the free range requirement of their traditional preconquest way-of-life. Among them an indigenously emerging supraliminal type of consciousness was coming into being.

In the isolated hamlets in the southern forests, infants were kept in continuous bodily contact with mothers or the mothers’ friends—on laps when they were seated, on hips, under arms, against backs, or on shoulders when they were standing. Even during intensive food preparation, or when heavy loads were being moved, babies were not put down. They had priority.

There was always a place for them against the body of a ‘mother’ or close associate. Loads could be shed or lightened, but babies were simply not put down, not deprived of constant, ever-ready, interactive body contact—even when the group was on the move under difficult conditions. Babies responded to this blanket of ever-ready empathetic tactile stimulation by tactile responses of their own. Very quickly they began assembling a sophisticated tactile-speech to transmit desires, needs, and states of mind. They didn’t whine or cry to get attention; they touched. While babies everywhere are liminally aware, the constant empathetic tactile contact required to produce a sophisticated type of preverbal communication is rare—except among preconquest peoples.

Eliciting delight from babies was a desired social norm, and attentive tactile stimulation was the daily lot of infants. It included protracted body-to-body caressing, snuggling, oral sensuality, hugging, fondling, and kissing. The seductive aspect of the play was frequently collective as older children singly or in combination used their inventive wiles to delight a baby. In their hamlets crying might be heard in reaction to accidental pain, but I don’t recall a single case of disgruntled whining or demanding crying.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding sibling rivalry, these southern hamlets also contrasted considerably with those of the sweet potato farmers in the north. Only in their villages could sibling rivalry be seen.<sup>8</sup> I tried hard to find at least one occurrence in those remote forest hamlets of the south, but it did not appear.

With nourishment, comfort, and stimulation constantly on hand, infants did not have to wait helplessly to have their needs met. They had no emotional need to anchor their libidos to abstract concepts of time, place, or kinship; and abstract foundations of awareness such as these were not imprinted on their nascent consciousness

As babies grew, their interests widened to the materials, objects, and activities at hand. They had amazing freedom to explore momentary whims and interests. At first, they did so

with one hand on the ‘mother,’ the other reaching out. Then they began making short sorties further and then further out from their ‘mothers’; just a few steps at first, then some more. Such moving out was on their own. Though a ‘mother’ or a ‘sibling’ might nod to encourage a baby who seemed uncertain about proceeding, they did not intervene or direct the baby’s interests or directions. They stayed just where they were, doing whatever they had been doing—but as bastions of security to which babies could return for comfort, assistance, or a sense of surety. Though elders did not go with babies on their jaunts, they were ever ready to assist with whatever might be brought to them. Babies joined the activities of elders; elders did not join theirs.

Not put aside when work was being done, infants remained constantly in touch with the activities of life around them, their tiny hands ever reaching out to whatever items or materials were in use, and onto the hands, arms, and muscles of the users. In this way even as tiny babes-in-arms they began accumulating a kinesthetic familiarity with the implements and activities of life.

This familiarity, supplemented by a rapidly developing ‘tactile-talk,’ produced in toddlers an ability to manage objects and materials safely that might be dangerous elsewhere. When first sojourning in those southern hamlets, I was repeatedly aghast to see toddlers barely able to stand upright playing with fire, wielding knives, and hefting axes—without concern by anyone around. Yet they did not burn down their grass/bamboo abodes or chop off their toes and fingers. During all the years I spent within their communities, I never saw these babies hurt themselves while engaged in this type of independent exploration.

When tots explored outward, their antennae stayed tuned to the affect, mood, and musculature of those they left behind, thereby maintaining affective connection across space. With adults and older children constantly a source of gratification rather than obstruction, toddlers had no desire to escape from supervision. Even slight intimations of concern from those behind, such as a tensing of musculature, was enough to stop a baby in its tracks and cast about for cues. While mothers in many places feel within themselves the kind of pain that might be looming for their baby, it’s not so instantly perceived. Faster than any words of warning could be formed, these New Guinea tots were already responding. No words necessary. If some subtle ‘all-clear’ cue did not quickly come, the infant made fast tracks to ‘home base.’ No reckless plunges onward, no furtive tricks to escape supervision.

When babies began acquiring verbal speech, their words and sentences floated out atop a sophisticated body-language already well in place. Even after acquiring spoken language, tactile-talk continued taking precedence in much of daily life.

It conveyed affect better. It was faster and more direct. Most of all it touched more deeply and more quickly into the hearts and minds of others. Tactile-talk was affect-talk. It integrated the spontaneous affect of individuals, often many at a time. So adept did young children become at this that they would at times merge actions into wordless synchrony.<sup>9</sup> With such rapport surrounding them tots could also safely enter into the rough-and-tumble play of older children. There were no games with rules, no formal skills to measure up to. Play was spontaneous, improvised, and exploratory, so small children were never in the way. Instead, their wide-eyed enthusiasm was a constant source of pleasure for the older children. The younger children were always welcome and were handled with intuitive regard and delight.

If some aggravation unwittingly occurred in the course of active play, it withered quickly within the collective empathy. Negative feelings thus faded before they had a chance to grow. Full-blown expressions of, for example, anger or sadness, were therefore very rare. That, too, contributed to the intuitive rapport that so delighted them.

Up to about seven or eight years of age, boys and girls played together, disporting in mixed groups in the gardens amid the plantings. Boys continued garden dalliance until about the age of eight or nine; then their interests shifted and their hearts turned toward exploring further regions with other boys. Small gangs went first down one trail, then another, through all the dispersed hamlet segments to the furthest gardens and beyond. Girls did not like this moving all about. They preferred the sensual relaxation of garden life, quiet, tactile play with one another and with smaller children. By 12 to 13 years of age they were merging garden sensuality with cultivation skills so artfully and seductively that they were attracting older males.<sup>10</sup> By their early teens they were often married.

Boys that age continued hunting and exploring out into the forest with like-minded comrades. Acquiring much of their own food there, they often ate and slept together in the ‘boys’-houses’ they constructed or took over. During adolescence, their rapport intensified. A rapid flow of synchronous regard began uniting them even more closely as they scattered through the forest, each constantly enlivening the others by a ceaseless, spirited, individualistic input into a unified at-oneness. The phenomenon was alien to my Western consciousness, and so beyond the English language that there are no good words for it even in the Oxford Unabridged. So, when trying to describe that kind of unity in English, the words bump up against each other as if contradictions—as in individualistic unified at-oneness, a phrase self-contradictory in English, and yet another indication of the magnitude of the gap separating these two types of consciousness. The following event illustrates:

One day, deep within the forest, Agaso, then about 13 years of age, found himself with a rare good shot at a cuscus in a nearby tree. But he only had inferior arrows. Without the slightest comment or solicitation, the straightest, sharpest arrow of the group moved so swiftly and so stealthily straight into his hand, I could not see from whence it came.

At that same moment, Karako, seeing that the shot would be improved by pulling on a twig to gently move an obstructing branch, was without a word already doing so, in perfect synchrony with Agaso's drawing of the bow, i.e., just fast enough to fully clear Agaso's aim by millimeters at the moment his bow was fully drawn, just slow enough not to spook the cuscus. Agaso, knowing this would be the case made no effort to lean to side for an unobstructed shot, or to even slightly shift his stance. Usumu similarly synchronized into the action stream, without even watching Agaso draw his bow, began moving up the tree a fraction of a second before the bowstring twanged.

He grasped the wounded cuscus before it might regain its senses and slipped out onto a slender branch that whizzed him down to dangle in the air an inch or so before Agaso's startled face. The startle had begun its standard transformation to ecstasy, when Usumu startled him again by provocatively dropping the quivering cuscus onto his naked foot, as he flicked a tasty beetle he'd found up in the tree into the pubis of delighted young Koniye (the youngest of the group). Doubly startled in quick succession, Agaso was wallowing in an ecstasy, then shared by all, until he abruptly realized that the cuscus might come back to life and dash off.<sup>11</sup> Then in a mirthful scramble they all secured it.

Within that type of spirit they roasted both beetle and cuscus on an open fire (to which two friends exploring separately added grubs they'd found in a rotting log). As night came on, one-by-one, they all dropped off to sleep together, entangled in what can only be described as a contagiously subdued rapture coalescence. It took many years for me to understand the underpinnings of this guileless hypersensual interactive unity (another example of the kind of language awkwardness that arises when speaking of events across eras).

In these isolated southern groups, such rapport by exploring boys was not restricted to comrades; it radiated out to strangers, too. With heightening élan, these youthful gangs would radiate into the graces of new faces in the forest. The following bit of oral history shows how a band of 'Fore' boys seduced even the aversive, warlike Awa, a people from an altogether different setting, way-of-life, and language family.<sup>12</sup> I heard variations of this story in many hamlets throughout the Waisarampa Valley in the 1960s. It tells of the first contact between the hunting-gathering-gardening southern 'Fore' and the instinctively hostile taro-growing Awa' from the great grasslands of the upper Lamari Valley. It is reconstructed here from several accounts:

One day, somewhat before World War II, two bands of

youths, one Fore the other Awa, were ranging out from their widely separated hamlet homes into the dense uninhabited forest ranges that stood between these different peoples. It was the first time either group had ventured out so far.

The Awa boys had darted from a side trail out onto a knife-edged promontory down which they were proceeding above the Lamari River, when they found themselves between the rear and forward elements of the Fore boys going out there too. With both front and rear blocked by Fore, and ridge sides at that point too precipitous to scramble down, they had no place to turn. They were hemmed in too closely to think of raising bows—or perhaps they were too young to think of it, or perhaps because they were so young their funny-bones got tickled, or the situation was so strange they simply went agog. For whatever reason, the antagonistic Awa nature didn't surface, and despite a gaping language barrier amity broke out.

They compared bows and arrows (the Awa had the best), then food (the Fore sweet potato was an instant hit). They examined each other's different kinds of dress and compared physiques.<sup>13</sup> When showers threatened, melding diverse building styles, they improvised a leaf-thatched shelter and spent the night close onto one another in the Fore sensual style. By morning they were bosom buddies.

At first light, they were up and out along the ridge on a hunt together. They showed off their different hunting styles, bagged a tree-kangaroo, cooked and ate it with the remaining sweet potato. When they separated to go back home, they made a date to meet at the same shelter at next full moon. The Awa promised to bring arrows to exchange for sweet potatoes.

Following this second meeting, two younger Awa boys, entranced by the prowess of their stronger new Fore friends, returned to stay with them in their hamlet for several days. Two Fore boys then went for a sojourn in the Awa hamlet of Yakia. They took a sack of sweet potatoes to trade for arrows.

In this way the two gangs became good friends and built a boys'-house near the famous knife-edged ridge to stay in together. Soon that site became an entrepôt for Fore-Awa trade, mainly arrows for sweet potatoes. A larger house was built to accommodate the flow. The Awa boys picked up Fore words, and the Fore, ever fond of playing with new expressions, picked up theirs. Soon all were speaking a Fore-Awa blend.

Later, two Fore sisters married two of the Awa youths and took possession of the older boys'-house (which then became a women's-house). The just-built new boys'-house then became a men's-and-boys'-house (by virtue of the marriages). With wives in residence, more gardens rapidly appeared. A sister of an Awa boy married his closest Fore comrade. So another women's-house was built, which she occupied with her unmarried Awa girl-friend (the 13-year-old sister of one of the original Awa boys). She soon married

one of the Fore boys.

In this way the first mixed Fore-Awa hamlet in the region came into being. As more cross-marriages occurred, a genetic merging of those Awa and Fore began.<sup>14</sup> More mixed hamlets came into being—on both sides of the Lamari. When the government arrived, they called those on the east side of the river, Awa, 'those on the west side, 'Fore'.

This account shows how the sensual verve and spirited amiability of exploratory Fore boys could unite quite different peoples. From an accidental meeting began a merging of 'Awa' with 'Fore' that was later clearly seen in blood-gene distributions. The event demonstrates how the Fore hunter-gatherer-gardeners made friends, how they segmented and recombined, and how dialect chains emerged between different language families.

## Noticing Preconquest Consciousness

The cognitive gap separating preconquest and postconquest life may be responsible for conquerors not recognizing it for what it was. It seems to have similarly blinkered modernized observers. For years I considered such child nurture practices an anomalous product of the remote New Guinea jungle and for a long time remained steadfastly unaware of its implications. Deeper understanding emerged at a snail's pace. Without non-dialectic techniques, understanding probably would never have occurred. Two such techniques emerged: (1) phenomenological data records made at the time of early contact, and (2) in-close, cross-cultural, direct experience.

The undifferentiated phenomenological data on the film allowed analysis to by-pass the normal dialectics-based inquiry systems of our Western culture. When these are escaped, the raw pattern-recognition capability of the human mind has fuller swing. When these visual data records (research films) of New Guinea childhood were reviewed again and again, patterns of recurrence and association began emerging. Eventually they stood out clearly to reveal the sociosensual basis of New Guinea childhood nurture. With the basic patterns thus exposed, these same patterns could then be quickly recognized wherever they occurred. After sighting several similar cases in widely separated preconquest enclaves, it was clear such practices represented a widespread early norm.

With such understanding it became much easier to employ in-depth, direct experience, another non-dialectic technique. In the course of daily living in a variety of preconquest enclaves, a clear, though undefinable, commonality of sensibility sometimes connected across cultural barriers, even in the absence of a common language. It required spontaneous, instinctive friendship beyond the level of ordinary discourse,

as when a heart-felt liking for someone simply just arose.<sup>15</sup> As mystical as that might seem, the affect exchanges then made possible led to sustained, adaptive, experiential interactions much deeper than those enabled merely by conversation. Experiential depth is what eventually revealed the major role played by affect coordination in preconquest life. Without this nonverbal cross-cultural bridge, it would not have been possible to grasp why preconquest mentality was so vulnerable to anger, deceit, greed, and aggression. Nor would it have been possible to notice crucial subtleties of sense-of-name, sense-of-space, sense-of-number, sense-of-truth, and sense-of-emotion.

Two unorthodox procedures going beyond the dialectic approach to truth of our Western culture were required to bring an important type of nonwestern consciousness to light.

## Basic Features of Preconquest Consciousness

As detailed below, major areas of preconquest human sensibility diverge strikingly from what one sees in postconquest sensibility. These areas, as they are set forth here, are too abstract and delimited to be meaningful to those who see the world through preconquest eyes. They focus on interconnection, interdigitation, and interdissolution. Only for more modern minds do formal cognitive divisions become important tools.

### Sense of Name

In these preconquest regions of New Guinea names were rarely binding. What one was called varied according to time, place, mood, and setting. Names were improvised, not formally bestowed, and naming (much like local language flexibility) was often a kind of humorous exploratory play. New names could be quickly coined, often whimsically from events and situations, with a new one coming up at any time. One young boy running in a peculiar way was affectionately dubbed 'Grasshopper.' It stuck. Another was called 'Kaba' (short for the prized embokaba beetle) because, during an episode of biting-mouthing play, a friend proclaimed his skin was as delicious as that savory beetle's flesh. One girl was called 'Aidpost' following her excitement about the first one in the region; another was called 'Sleepgood' by a new friend who liked sleeping with her. A boy from a distant hamlet in the south who tagged along when I went north to the new Australian Patrol Post fled into the jungle in crouched, zigzagging panic when an object he believed to be a metal house abruptly growled and moved. His name became 'Land Rover'

Names were nicknames. They stuck for a while, then a new

one came along. Only when the new (Australian) government began insisting that they use the same name for official dealings, especially in the annual census soon instituted, did formal names emerge. Otherwise, individuals responded to whatever name they knew they might be called.<sup>16</sup>

Place-names were equally as flexible. They emerged from distinctive landmarks, the plants or animals that might be found there, the name of someone memorably associated with the site, or just by an interesting event that had occurred at the location. One place in the forest took its name from a boy who had fallen from a tree there. Names were often impromptu, with different names being used at different times even by close friends. Group names, too, were informal. A group might be referred to by the site its main hamlet occupied, by the name of someone in the group, or by some noteworthy event involving the group. Since groups frequently segmented and reconstituted, such names came and went and were not considered particularly significant. Not all members of a group used the same name even for themselves, much less their group of associates. Just as for individuals and places, there were numerous possibilities for naming groups, and they often had several names.

## **Sense of Space**

Just as body language originated in empathetic responsiveness to affect, so did sense-of-space. These pre-conquest people had no standard way to partition lands, to measure time and distance, to project abstract boundaries onto regions, or to impose abstract spatial concepts. Geographic sensibility was simply affect relationships thrust out onto surroundings. Such geography was haphazard and rarely uniform. It fluctuated over time, from place-to-place and from individual-to-individual.

Meaningfulness emerged from the affect associated with a place—e.g., comfort, excitement, enjoyment, eagerness, interest, delicious foods, good company, etc. Such ‘geographical’ entities had recognizable centers, but they overlapped and graded imperceptibly into one another—just as did their kinship and their languages. Such geography, though clear enough at centers of rapport, was indistinct and fuzzy where affect association lessened or became ambiguous. All boundaries, spatial and otherwise, were therefore hazy, inconsistent, and ambiguous.

Navigating such affect-space is not at all like barreling down the Beltway to Bethesda or even going to Mars. Feelings mattered, not hours, kilometers, or abstract directions. When I meandered through the forests within the affect-space of New Guinea friends, one and then another would branch to complex, divergent different paths, regrouping variously along the way—because that’s how their affect-geographies were

panning out that day. At first traveling in affect-space seemed entirely unworldly—much too indirect, labyrinthine, snail-paced, and intellectually disorderly. I conceived space through maps and compasses, schedules and boundaries, and was geared mentally to a Euclidean sense-of-space. I was map cognitive. Among these people, feelings about locales were what mattered, and it was feelings that defined them. Arbitrary geographical divisions were devoid of such meaning, so had no relevance to them and were unrecognized. A locale’s name varied according to the numerous affect relations different people had with it. There were no abstract sectionings of space, no geometric projections onto space, no projected boundaries to undo their sense of interdigitation.

To get directions to go somewhere required shared knowledge of local place names. Due to the deeply dissected, convoluted, densely forest covered mountain setting, no locales were reachable except via obscure winding jungle trails on which any sense of direction was very soon befuddled. There were no direct ways to go even out to somewhat distant gardens. When asking how to go somewhere, a string of local names is what I’d get, and not always the same ones. Even simple abstractions (like right and left or east and west) did not enter in. Instead of saying turn right at some forking of the trail, they would say ‘take the path to wherever.’ And so forth. Locations could be pointed at, if visible—much as one might point to a person or a house. But to point was not to tell you how to get there. They might point at some landmark in the distance, such as a mountain, and tell you that the place you asked about was behind it. If they thought you knew how to get to some mutually recognized place on the mountain, they would then spit forth the string of trail-connected names beyond (if they knew them).

Just how strong a general sense of location existed was not easy to determine. Pointing toward things not visible was not usually on the mark as when following a winding, forest obscured trail (remember, I had a compass), unless the site was very near. So when going beyond a place I knew, I had to go with local friends familiar with the route. To go further I had to hope they had a friend out there who could show the path onward to the next. When going through a series of such regions on a protracted regional survey, I had to find new guides in each new area of settlement. This more extensive type of traveling required following kinship and dialect chains across the region—sometimes even just to go ten miles, as flies the crow.

When I first went into the region I was still a somewhat cocky Westerner with little cross-cultural sensibility. I repeatedly tried to get my point across with maps and compasses and even aerial photographs. All useless. Every time I tried to explain a to b directness, boundaries, or standard measures,

though they seemed eager to get the point. They eventually just went blank.

Some concluded I was playing word games and would simply laugh. In those days the territory was mapped only in the very crudest sense (from hastily produced World War II aerial photographs without ground information). So reliance on local friends was the only way I could find my way around. My overwhelming daily problem was how to guess which local friends might have the most favorable socio-geography for where I had to go that day. It was grievously perplexing at first—then it became a deeply moving introduction into the world of affect-geography.

## Sense of Number

Counting, like boundaries, took on importance only where supraliminal consciousness was developing, i.e., in the agricultural regions of the north where sweet potato had become the staple. In the forests of the south, where liminal consciousness was most highly evolved, few could count above five without great effort. They had no precise names for higher numbers, and scarcely any for the lower digits. The word for five was a cognate of their word for hand. Some understood that several hands meant larger quantities; but beyond two hands (ten) the word was usually ‘many.’ Sometimes a foot would be added, or a nose. One friend added his penis in a humorous demonstration of the foolishness of taking the task of counting seriously. When it was erect, he said, it was worth even more. Quantity was impressionistic, not numerical. What mattered was the magnitude of collective joy produced—not how many items could be counted. Depending on taste and circumstance, a single unit might be more important than many units at another time or place. Plants and animals collected during hunting-gathering were rarely of the same size and kind, so counting rarely had much point. Counting was indeed like mixing penises with toes, and just as foolish, which was the point my friend was trying to make.

A more precise sense of counting developed only in the north where pigs had become a means of value exchange between groups needing allies. Adult pigs were rather much the same size, so they lent themselves to counting. Sweet potato cultivation meant that many pigs could be raised. These pigs were then used to forge and confirm political and defense alliances. Counts firmed up these types of relationships. Higher counts conferred status and thus political power. Where pig counting became a general practice, the number bestowed at pig exchange feasts affected availability of wives, security of settlements, rights to land, and trade relationships. As pig feasts became more lavish, so did counting. Where fifty pigs might be presented at a feast, two fingers worth of two hands (twenty) or a hand’s worth of two hands (fifty) were

widely understood.

## Sense of Truth

As detailed above, sociosensual child nurture spawned body language based on tactile exchanges of affect. Infants were quick to notice that the happiness of others made their own lives happier and richer, so they responded accordingly. Soon they realized that the more accurately and fully they conveyed their inner needs and interests, the more quickly rewarding responses were forthcoming. So they displayed true feelings without artifice, as openly and clearly as their tiny frames permitted. The more skilled they were, the happier they were; indeed, the happier were all.

Therefore ‘tactile-talk’ was ‘affect-talk.’ and ‘affect-talk’ was ‘truth-talk. It was so compelling that even after learning verbal speech children continued bouncing inner passions back and forth in ‘affect-talk. The messages were more emotionally rewarding. They moved more quickly and more accurately and were usually more deeply evocative. Spoken words did not have the same instant sensuality and were thus more remote from lives sentiently focused. Affect-talk was truth-talk because it only worked when personal feelings were above board and accurately expressed, which required transparency in aspirations, interests, and desires.

With body language based on full-time accurate truth, infants became candid and open, and remained so as they grew. When I first went into their hamlets I was astonished to see the words of tiny children accepted at face value—and so acted on. For months I tried to find at least one case where a child’s words were considered immature and therefore disregarded. No luck. I tried to explain the idea of lying and inexperience. They didn’t get my point. They didn’t expect prevarication, deception, grandstanding, or evasion. And I could find no cases where they understood these concepts. Even teenagers remained transparently forthright, their hearts opened wide for all to gaze inside.

## Recognition of Emotion

Such an open life shapes awareness of emotions, which was seen in their responses to a standardized set of photographs of basic emotions.<sup>17</sup> Individuals from the most isolated regions became highly agitated when shown photographs of anger. Some went dumb, others became tongue-tied, many trembled, some perspired profusely or looked wildly about. Those from remotest hamlets reacted most dramatically. Not just confounded, they were fearful too. It was an astonishing and gripping spectacle.<sup>18</sup>

In those isolated hamlets of the south emotions such as anger, if inadvertently induced by rough-and-tumble play, quickly faded in the ambiance of constant empathetic rapport and

tactile stimulation. Getting angry among confreres was like one hand getting angry with the other. So they were not accustomed to full-blown expressions of negative emotions. When confronted with our photographs of full-blown anger, many were stunned, frightened, and disoriented. Even in photographs not intended to show anger, they sometimes noticed subtle traces that are so common in the West that they are not even considered anger there.

They had other reasons to be frightened of negative emotions. They had no formal social structure, therefore no stable social safety net to hold them all together when affect-rapport gave way. When it did, as in the 'time-of-troubles,' they were bereft, existentially desolated.

## **Collapse of Preconquest Consciousness**

The time-of-troubles in New Guinea was regional. In smaller preconquest isolates such disorders were sometimes confined to single tiny islands, even villages, even segments of the village population (e.g., teenagers often seemed particularly susceptible). Nonetheless in all cases the subtlest affect exchanges faded first with intuitive rapport going into irreversible collapse much later.

After loss of intuitive rapport, the sensually empathetic instincts governing sociosensual nurture became cruder and were less often on-the-mark. In large regions a grand cultural amnesia sometimes accompanied this collapse. Whole populations would forget even recent past events and make gross factual errors in reporting them. In some cases they even forgot what type and style of garments they had worn a few years earlier or (in New Guinea) that they had been using stone axes and eating their dead close relatives a few years back. Initially I thought they were dissimulating in an effort to ingratiate or appear up-to-date, but rejected this thought almost immediately. They were simply too unassuming and open in other respects for such a theory to hold up. And when I showed photographs I'd taken a few years earlier, they would brighten up, laugh, and eagerly call their friends as they excitedly began relating their reviving recollections.

The periods of anomie sometimes alternated with spates of wild excitement leading to a strange mixture of excess and restraint.<sup>19</sup> It was during such disorders that abstract concepts of rights, property, and possession began emerging. So did formal names for people, groups, and places. These were then used argumentatively in defense of rights, property, and possessions. Negative emotions were applied to strengthen argument. Eventually they became structural aspects of society. As the art of political manipulation emerged, the selfless unity that seemed so firm and self-repairing in their isolated enclaves vanished like a summer breeze as a truth-

based type of consciousness gave way to one that lied to live.

A similar type of turmoil and transformation began occurring on small islands in the eastern Sea of Andaman somewhat after the Vietnam War.

South East Asia was then rapidly developing economically, and the dazzling scenery, fine beaches, and crystal waters of many of those islands attracted an explosively abrupt tourism trade. As it gathered pace, the intuitive rapport that was still extant on many islands first began to waver, then to oscillate. In some cases a half-way house adjustment would occur, and then another, both without serious psychological disability. However, in cases of accelerated change, a whirlwind psychological debility would sometimes suddenly break loose. The following, abstracted from my field notes, is a firsthand description of one such case:

I'm out, back from the Andaman where I've just been through an experience I'll not soon forget. Only by pure chance did I happen to be there when their extraordinary intuitive mentality gave up the ghost right in front of me, in an inconceivable overwhelming week. I'm almost wrecked myself, in a strange anomie from having gone through that at too close a range, and from staying up all night too many times to try to understand just what was going on. I never was much good at keeping research distance, always feeling more could be learned close in. And I'd come straight into the Andaman from two months of tantric philosophical inquiry in a Tibetan monastery. Perhaps that tuned awareness up a notch too much.

There really was no way to have predicted that, just after I arrived, the acute phase of their ancient culture's death would start. To speak abstractly of the death of a way-of-life is a simple thing to do. To experience it is quite another thing. I've seen nothing in the lore of anthropology that might prepare one for the speed by which it can occur, or for the overwhelming psychic onslaughts it throws out. Nor does my profession forewarn of those communicable paroxysms that hover in the air which, without warning, strike down with overwhelming force, when a culture's mind gives way.

Yet this is just what happened when the traditional rapport of those islands was undone, when the subtle sensibility of each to one another was abruptly seared away in a sudden unpredicted, unprecedented, uncognated whirlwind. In a single crucial week a spirit that all the world would want, not just for themselves but for all others, was lost, one that had taken millennia to create. It was suddenly just gone.

Epidemic sleeplessness, frenzied dance throughout the night, reddening burned-out eyes getting narrower and more vacant as the days and nights wore on, dysphasias of various sorts, sudden mini-epidemics of spontaneous estrangement, lacunae in perception, hyperkinesis, loss of sensuality, collapse of love, impotence, bewildered frantic looks like those on buffalo in India just as they're clubbed to death; 14

year olds (and others) collapsing on the beach, under houses, on the pier, in beached boats as well as those tied up at the dock, here and there, into wee hours of the morn, even on through dawn, in acute inebriation or exhaustion. Such was the general scene that week, a week that no imagination could have forewarned, the week in which the subtle sociosensual glue of the island's traditional way-of-life became unstuck.

To pass through the disintegrating social enclaves was to undergo a rain of psychic blows, a pelting shower of harrowing awarenesses that raised goose flesh of unexpected types on different epidermal sites along with other kinds of crawlings of flesh and skin. There were sudden rushes, both cold and hot, down the head and chest and across the neck, even in the legs and feet. And deep inside, often near the solar plexus, or around heart, or in the head or throat, new indescribable sensations would spontaneously arise, leave one at a loss or deeply disconcerted.

Such came and then diffused away as one passed by different people. Sensations would abruptly wash in across the consciousness, trigger moods of awe, or of sinking, sometimes of extraordinary love, sometimes utter horror. From time-to-time nonspecific elemental impulses arose just to run or dance, to throw oneself about, to move. All these could be induced and made to fade and then come back, just by passing through some specific group, departing, and then returning, or by coming near a single friend, moving off and coming back. That this was possible so astonished me that I checked and checked and checked again.

Such awarenesses, repeatedly experienced, heap up within the brain. Eventually the accumulation left me almost as sleepless and night-kinetic as they had become. I did discover that with body motion, mind becomes less preoccupied within itself, therefore less distressed. With kinetic frenzy mind-honor lessens very much. But it left them exhausted during the day, somnambulant, somewhat zombie-like. When night returned, the cycle would re-begin, as if those nocturnal hours, when they would otherwise be sleeping, were the time of greatest stress.

Though the overt frenzied movements could be observed by anyone, the psychic states that so powerfully impelled them were not easily detectable to outsiders. It seemed as if one had to have some personal rapport within the lifeway before the mental anguish could be sensed. Then it would loom, sometimes overwhelm. One Westerner looking casually on said, 'How exotic to see these uneducated types staying up throughout the night, dancing strangely, relating to each other in nonproductive ways. This place must be an anthropological paradise: Tourists happening on the scene thought it a fillip to their holiday. Intimacy and affection seem prerequisite to connecting with these inner surges of human psyche, even overwhelming ones.

Eventually I retreated, mentally exhausted, cognitively numbed, emotionally wrung out. I tried to thwart that siege (when I finally recognized it for what it really was) by

getting key people out. A useless foolish gambit; for no one would leave the spot, as if they were welded to it, as if it held some precious thing they very greatly loved, which they neither would nor could abandon.

When the mental death had run its course, when what had been was gone, the people (physically still quite alive) no longer had their memory of the intuitive rapport that held them rapturously together just the week before, could no longer link along those subtle mental pathways. What had filled their lives had vanished. The teensters started playing at (and then adopting) the rude, antagonistic, ego-grasping styles of the encroaching modern world, modeled after films and then TV. Oldsters retreated into houses, lost their affinity to youngsters, who then turned more to one another, sometimes squabbling (which did not occur before).

It seems astonishing that the inner energy of such passings is so undetectable to minds not some way linked to the inner harmonies and ardors of the place. Research-distance yields abstractions like 'going amok,' which could have been easily applied that week, or 'revitalizing movement,' which also could have been (in a perverse kind of way). It seems that only by some mental coalescence with the local lifeway can one access its deeper psychic passions, not just those of adolescence, but graver ones like those which for a time were released in inconceivable profusion, when the collective subtle mind of the islands, built up over eons, was snuffed out.

Similar processes, perhaps not always so dramatic, seem to occur when any domineering or abstractly focused alien culture (whether Western, Sinic, Indic, or Islamic) impacts on a pre-conquest people. To the degree that the in-depth readjustment requires new relationships between the awareness and manipulation centers in the cerebral cortex and the centers of emotion in the mid and lower brains, they represent physiological as well as psychological change and therefore raise important questions about the promise and condition of the state of humankind.

## **Resketching the Civilizational Process**

The details set forth above show how pre-conquest consciousness can be transformed into a post-conquest type. They also show how an integrative human mental evolutionary development was destroyed by the emergence of an adversarial one. Such knowledge enables a re-examination of the civilizational process from a pre-civilizational perspective. Indeed, in the face of these insights such re-sketching virtually suggests itself. Since all four major civilization developments of the world (Western, Sinic, Indic, and Islamic) have conquistadorial features, a sketch of one makes the basic point. We know that pre-civilizational Mediterranean had a sparse and dispersed population with tracts of lands unusually suitable for onset of agriculture.<sup>20</sup> So, let's

sketch out how our Western Civilization is most likely to have emerged from its birthplace there.

It is common knowledge that agriculture enables larger populations. We also know that larger populations sometimes outstrip the natural resources they depend upon (much like what happened with sweet potato in New Guinea). In primeval Mediterranean agricultural innovation would have come on spottily at first, here and there, not everywhere at once; in some places it started a millennium later. Where regions became congested, and new land resources scarce, the free-range requirement of prequest life disappeared—slowly at first since surrounding virgin lands would for quite some time be able to absorb pressed peoples. Eventually, however, there would be confinement, confrontation, and conflict. At that point in the evolution, a psychological transformation commenced, one that focused with growing intensity on emergent cognitive abstractions and symbols by which to anchor claims to property. As these took hold, possessiveness evolved as a basic human trait.

As possessive populations continued to increase, larger bands of emergent postquest people moved more frequently and more forcibly into neighboring prequest regions. This produced a faster mental transformation due to the nature of the impact of aggressive *miens* on prequest people: It first paralyzed their intuitive rapport and then disabled it. Where exposure to conquistadorial temperament was light, or episodic, a relatively nontraumatic adjustive transformation was possible. In the face of sustained powerful exposure to anger, deceit, or greed, prequest mentality collapsed. In the traumatic existential period that caused, instinctive compassion gave way to savagery, generosity to greed, and heart-felt harmony to basic sexuality. A 'savage-savage' arose from the ashes of the 'noble-savage. Brigandage and piracy became adjustive practices. Claiming land tended to be declamatory and demanding, often backed by arms. To tell a brigand from landowner might well require waiting to see who won. Once domain was securely established, settlements were possible, indeed required for defensive reasons. With settlement, wealth accumulation became possible.

With a plentiful supply of savages, pirates, and brigands in this early period, and with landowners being from much the same mold, property and wealth had to be defended. Warriors were required. Then armies. When they were not equal to their task, defensive edge could be acquired by alliances forged and stabilized through formal wealth exchanges that required counts and records. As increasingly sophisticated means of accounting and record keeping emerged, rights and title could be sustained by reasoned argument.

As wealth grew, so did armies. City-states soon had to conquer weaker neighbors to get wealth enough to themselves stay

independent. Some discovered that people who had no wealth at all could be forced to produce it by enslavement or taxation. Conquistadors then moved out more broadly into prequest regions to force ever larger populations to create material wealth and to keep it moving into their treasuries. Region after region lost their prequest consciousness in this wave of conquest. When prequest empathy and instinctive unity were gone, legal codes and law enforcement practices became necessary—not just to keep the peace in conquered lands, but at home as well. A careful reading of the history of forms of government from the very first states yet known (in the Nile Valley and southern Mesopotamia around 3200 B.C.) suggest this basic situation pertained widely, e.g., in the ancient states of Sumar, Egypt, Persia, and Assyria; the Byzantine and Caliphate empires of the Middle East; in the Han, Tang, and Ming dynasties of Imperial China; and in the classical states of Greece and Rome and their European and American descendents.<sup>21</sup>

Literary accounts of the early Mediterranean world leave little ambiguity about this process once it started. Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Caesar, and later Machiavelli, among others, reveal a conquest-oriented ethos in the emergent Western world. The poetry, plays, and orations of the early period poignantly depict the human consequences of conquest (*viz.*, Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Homer, Cicero).

As this civilizational process continued, in the pattern of its onset, philosophies of governance emerged. They were first a means to anchor conquest, then to manage seized property and wealth according to the wishes of the conquerors. Formal ideologies to conjoin governed peoples emerged. Loyalty to an abstract idea of nation began grasping hearts and minds. Since states that managed resources rationally became stronger, reasoned argument became a power tool. While truth in conquered territories could be arbitrarily imposed, in keeping with the nature of conquest, states that managed resources rationally became stronger. Reasoned argument developed. Such refinements as the *zetetic*, *elenctic*, and *meiotic* modes of dialectic reasoning emerged and were eventually formalized in the dialectic systems of Socrates and Aristotle. Since a conquest ethos lay at their root, it should not be surprising that the dialectic form was conquistadorial as well. It enabled one to dip into the kaleidoscopic maelstrom of direct sentient experience, drag out chunks, and make latent mental entities of them—as if by such capture, as if by such conquest of the senses, a higher reality was bestowed. It produced a means by which the elements of the sentient world could be materialized, conquered, and controlled according to the interests and desires of established rulers.

Despite the worldly strength bestowed by this approach to truth, surgings of that older psychic unity would unpredictably

reappear, viz., the Eleusinian and Dionysian mysteries, the more arcane philosophies of Christian love, and later, when no longer discouraged by immolation, shunning, and the like, various secular writings that touch into the long covertized sensual aspects of preconquest life (which to some degree probably had been going on all the while in various secluded places such as hideaways, nooks, courtly bedrooms, or even barnyards). These resurgences were remarkably akin to those erratic wellings up of sociosensual inclination I saw when collapsed preconquest communities began restabilizing in a postconquest mode. They leaked out spontaneously and unpredictably as if from some panhuman reservoir so deep it could neither be undone by existential terror nor seduced by worldly thoughts of ownership and power.

If this sketch inspired by observation of today's preconquest remnants seems too bold, consider this more noetic thought: From whence come those words that idolize our esteemed ideas of civilization? That intriguing question cannot be dealt with here, except perhaps to note the obvious need to use the thought processes bequeathed to us by our civilization even to engage the question. A step back in time to earlier this century may provide some flicker of illumination. Read R. R. Maret's scholarly foreword to White's (1922) book, *The Sea Gypsies of Malaya*, an example not unlike many of its genre. I mention this one because, from my own direct experience in the subject, it helps me see what happened.<sup>22</sup>

Maret's foreword is an erudite introduction and critique actually meant to help White. Maret, the distinguished armchair Oxford anthropologist, was well established at the pinnacle of the sense-of-truth created by Western Civilization. White had no such pretensions. Yet his thoughtful and reflective accounts of the Moken people and encyclopedic revelation of their setting are products of an open mind shaped by years of direct hands-on experience. He had close friends among the Moken and interacted with them on their terms.

Maret's foreword is modest, even self-effacing, as befits the genre. It is largely friendly and supportive and certainly well meaning. Nonetheless, it imposes onto White's thoughtful observations an analysis in the didactic argumentative academic mode by which truth gets recognized and established in the West. In a sense, it is a silk-gloved academic conquest of White's work carefully and eruditely set forth in fine academic style. But it informs us not a whit about the Moken, even leads us astray from them (admittedly easier to see more than a half century later). Since Maret is so clearly a well-meaning and thoughtful person, one can only wonder how this could have happened. Close examination reveals a reliance on the standard form evolved from the conquistadorial sense-of-truth bequeathed by the Western civilizational process. It is actually academic domineering

under the guise of urbane, polite critique. It tells us nothing of how the Moken think or what they really are. Its main achievement is to reinforce the sanctity of the Western mode of thinking in the face of Moken challenge.

White's non-academic words, on the other hand, are a product of many years of in-close human contact with people he came to like. He speaks reflectively and from the heart. Though what he says is interlaced with guileless commonplace comparisons with his own background, he sets those out so unabashedly and straightforwardly that they provide a bridge that helps us better sink into meanings that are Moken. There's no bridge at all in the logically delivered, academically profound conquistadorial commentary by the distinguished armchair don.

## Basic Problems in Cross-cultural Observation

The negative emotions of supraliminally focused potato farmers in New Guinea devastated the sociosensual rapport of liminally focused hunter-gatherer-gardeners whose open range they began seizing for private benefit—automatically, without awareness they were doing so. Western visitors, merely by their presence, paralyzed the cognitive processes of liminally focused Sea Nomads in the Sea of Andaman—automatically, without awareness they were doing so. These examples illustrate the first basic problem in cross-cultural observation: people from one culture can be grossly unaware of the transformational impact they have on people from a different culture.

When I was first exposed to sociosensual cultures, I saw neither their underlying sociosensuality nor the intuitive rapport it spawned. Never mind that these features were the principal game of life—in those days they were opaque to me just as much as to any other outsider. Even after a year in residence with such people I had only gained an unarticulated, marginal awareness. It took repeated exposure to several preconquest cultures over decades before I had any real local indigenous sensibility. This illustrates the second basic problem in cross-cultural observation: inability of people from one culture to see the fundamental dynamics of another culture when they fall outside the observer's own cultural experience.

When I first entered the isolated hamlets of the New Guinea forest, the remote atolls of Micronesia and Polynesia, and finally several other sociosensual cultures across the world, I was at first nonplused by what were openly erotic aspects of infant nurture. Due to my Western cultural conditioning, I averted gaze, avoided notice, kept it at arm's length, failed to give it recognition, or even to talk or write about it. Only after years of fieldwork in these regions did I become sufficiently

blasé to cease my reflexive avoidance. This illustrates a third basic problem in cross-cultural observation: the tendency to avoid noticing major features of another culture when they are incongruent with unspoken codes of probity inculcated by one's own culture.

In the eastern Andaman, before many of the traditional isolated islands were suddenly and unexpectedly targeted for tourism, traditional empathetic inclinations remained well developed and in tact for many groups. When these populations instinctively sensed that childhood genital tactility perturbed their new visitors, automatically, seemingly without thought, they modified just those aspects of behavior that seemed to discomfit their guests. Soon childhood genitality was no longer seen when visitors were about. On nearby islands that had not attracted tourists, these erotic aspects of child nurture remained out in the open for all to see. On my first visits to the more isolated isles of the eastern Andaman, just as happened in New Guinea, the erotic aspects of child and infant nurture started fading. Being more sophisticated then, I took special care to keep my cultural ethos masked on some islands and unmasked on others. The erotic aspects began disappearing from view where I did not mask my hometown Western ethos, but they remained visible and very much in the open where I masked that conditioning. Where I masked and then unmasked, the eroticism started vanishing and then returned, slowly at first, but eventually to the extent I had seen at first contact. This illustrates a fourth basic problem in cross-cultural observation: preconquest peoples, indeed any empathetically oriented people, will suppress even major behavioral traits to avoid discomfiture to others.

## Reflections

For several years after I began contacting preconquest peoples like those described above, I considered their type of consciousness an oddity, a kind of naive primitive emotionality, one perhaps suitable only for small, isolated groups, but certainly for no one else. It took a long time for me to realize that they had evolved their own sophisticated type of cognition that was simply different from what I (or anyone I knew) was used to. And I came to realize that such mentality could not be considered primitively ignorant if only because it was so sensitively intelligent and beneficially responsive. It moved more facilely, more harmoniously, and more constructively than do the mentalities associated with today's postconquest world. Furthermore, it provided for an astonishingly rewarding and zestful life.

This sophisticated development of human mentality may be realizable only in preconquest settings like those described above. There is no evidence that it is a universal, benevolent

nature common to all early humankind. It would be unreasonable to assume that human mentality evolved the same way everywhere during prehistoric times. Less altruistic types also evolved. It appears that at least one such combative type in Mediterranean progressively demolished its earlier preconquest type of life.

The preconquest mentality discussed here emerges only where infants have no need to weld libido to abstract concepts of identity, regularity, or association. Under such conditions the logical sense-of-truth of our Western 'Age of Reason' simply remains outside their realm of reason. Instead of applying rules logically sorted out (to know just where they stand or how they must fit in), these preconquest infants boldly thrust their sentient interests and awarenesses into an empathetic experiential maelstrom. The boundary-resistant, fluctuating pulses of cognition they experience there leave logic at a loss, therefore undeveloped. This may seem primitive, even a madhouse to those whose sense-of-reason is built on clear concepts logically examined. Yet a remarkably harmonious, on-the-mark intuitive rapport was the lot of these preconquest peoples. Such nonlogical rapport presents serious problems both for epistemologists and anthropologists, as it does for modern 'common folk.' For many years, my logical mind considered such cognitive separations insurmountable. Now I think that they only are when inquiry is held too rigorously within a single culture's ethos and system of beliefs.<sup>23</sup>

Questions going far beyond the quandary stated at the beginning of this chapter are raised. As fascinating as we may find the impact of conquering cultures on preconquest groups, it pales before the challenge to epistemology posed by the existence of a system of cognition not based on symbolic logic. We of Western training may find it virtually impossible to see how truth can be demonstrated without recourse to symbols that are logically controlled. When I first came face-to-face with these experientially-based modes of cognition wherein logic was irrelevant, they slid right past me. I did not even see them. Even when I did begin to catch on, I tended to doubt such perceptions once I was again within the confines of Western culture. It took years of repeated, even dramatic exposure before these initially fragmentary mental graspings were able to survive re-immersion in Western culture. Experiences repeated, however, eventually make their mark and I began to question whether symbolic logic was actually the only means to get at truth. Now I rather think that alternative routes to truth may exist within the immediacy of a type of experiential awareness that perhaps moves in extra-sentient directions not yet brought into the realm of our modern sense-of-truth.<sup>24</sup> My slowness in this matter leads me to believe it may take modern humankind some time to identify and make use of these perhaps more rarefied mental capabilities.

If such capabilities could indeed be realized, what practical significance might they have on the world as it has currently evolved? Integrative (as opposed to adversarial) approaches to truth might benefit a population that is becoming increasingly congested in its planetary home. Freeing epistemology from the so-called 'Age of Reason' might even bring scholarly benefits, such as opening areas of inquiry notoriously resistant to logical investigation, e.g., the visionary quests of sorcerers, the meditational insights of lamas, or just those evanescent understandings people sometimes grasp in that never-never land between sleep and waking. It might also help us understand those awareness flows that can occur across seemingly impenetrable cultural and cognitive barriers, as, for example, when liking is astir. Inquiry into such matters has long resisted both syntax and logic as well as the crucial pillars underlying them: e.g., quantification, measurement, and classification. A new way of looking would seem required.

Finally, in the ultimate analysis, we do not yet have a way to know if the postconquest type of consciousness that dominates the world today represents a positive or negative shift in the evolution of mentality. This question of fundamental values bears on all of humankind and on the future of humanity. Thus, of all the questions raised, it is the one that most demands an answer.

## Notes

An earlier version of this essay under the title 'Cross-Cultural Epistemological Conundrums' was presented at the 70th Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association (Pacific Division) in Seattle, Washington, 3-6 April 1996. Older research material, drawn in to support the findings presented here, appears in a series, titled 'Sensuality and Consciousness,' published by *Anthropology of Consciousness*. Copyrights 1995, 1996, 1997, Dr. E Richard Sorenson.

1. For a particularly dramatic case of integration with nature's forces that occurred in the eastern Andaman see Sorenson (1995). [\[Back\]](#)
2. The 'savage-savage' emerged in a time-of-troubles in which generosity gave way to grasping, instinctive sharing to instinctive hoarding, instantaneous friendship to calculated politics, automatic benevolence to selfish calculation, and spontaneous amity to warfare. The generous libidos of the spirited exploratory youths of prequest communities were then transformed into the suspicious militancy of warriors shorn of generalized intuitive rapport. Such transformations reveal the vulnerability of the sophisticated nonwestern type of intelligence that evolved in prequest settings. [\[Back\]](#)
3. I did not personally observe the Yequena in Venezuela's Coroni River region; however observations by Jean Liedloff (1975) show harmonious behavior and child nurture almost identical to what we saw, first, in those most isolated enclaves in the Central

Range of New Guinea at the time of contact and, then, in less dramatic form in other prequest groups where consciousness remained focused liminally. [\[Back\]](#)

4. The dynamics by which the 'savage-savage' emerged from a 'noble savage' is presented in Sorenson (1997). [\[Back\]](#)
5. There are relevant works in Western science that comport with existence of liminal areas of consciousness which were completed before the concept of liminal consciousness was publicized. While these scientists were, therefore, not in a position to refer to liminal consciousness as such, their work nonetheless provides material on some of its physiological and psychological underpinnings. The grandest operational field for liminal consciousness was opened up by the now classic neurophysiological work of MacLean (1993). In his physiology of the development of mentality he shows neurological connections between the limbic system of the midbrain and the cerebral cortex that provide considerable scope for the interplay of consciousness within nonverbalized realms touching on emotions, immediacy and sexuality—all vital aspects of liminal consciousness. Adams' (1993) studies of the parieto and occipital lobes of the cerebral cortex suggest physical sites for the kind of liminal consciousness we saw in prequest peoples. Though Adams is materialistic in orientation, the 'gut-feelings' of which he speaks are within the realm of consciousness since, if they were outside, we wouldn't know we had them. The same is true of emotions. Such aspects of consciousness fall well within the parameters of liminal consciousness.

Tononi (1991) revealed physiological sites in the brain that are consistent with a liminal type of consciousness. He shows that qualities such as shape, size, proximity, alignment, and motion (all important elements of liminal consciousness) are managed by the visual (not the verbal) cortex. Berger and Luckmann (1966), in a study of the social structure of reality, speak of a 'primary socialization' that is worth examining in connection with the instinctively consensual socialization that occurs among prequest peoples. They also speak of 'secondary socialization' which seems not to exist in these prequest populations, at least on the instructive or coercive level. It is important to realize that Berger and Luckmann are particularly concerned about the importance of 'mental hygiene' as remedial socialization which they consider a necessary ingredient for human alliance. The fascinating aspect of such 'hygiene' is that, among the prequest peoples, it occurred spontaneously without duress in the realm of consensual liminal sensibility. Laughlin (1994) establishes a context for liminal consciousness in his biogenetic structural account of Tibetan Yoga. He speaks of 'sensorial space' as the introspectively perceived output of 'sensorial dots' that provide for immediate perception of sensorial events. This type of immediacy is the hallmark of the liminal consciousness seen in the prequest populations studied. [\[Back\]](#)

6. The initial observations of infant and child nurture practices that gave rise to their liminal type of consciousness (and sense-of-truth) were presented before the effect of such practices on

consciousness development was understood (Sorenson 1976, 1979). While those details are correct, only after additional experience among several preconquest peoples did the nature of the mentality involved become clear. The initial presentation of the relationship of infant handling and child rearing practice to basic mentality among these aboriginal groups was first presented in Sorenson (1996). [\[Back\]](#)

7. Only in the southern communities where play with infants was sensually interactive were crying and affect-withdrawal rare. In the supraliminally focused sweet potato communities of the north such traits were often seen. [\[Back\]](#)
8. Only in these southern hamlets was sibling rivalry not seen. Among the sweet potato farmers in the north sibling rivalry could frequently be seen. [\[Back\]](#)
9. There were no funds for filming in the eastern Sea of Andaman. However, much the same sort of synchrony was filmed among young Canela Indian children in Brazil. Several sequences of synchronous activity were assembled for a report film on the subject (Sorenson & Crocker 1983). [\[Back\]](#)
10. In areas where hunting-gathering was emphasized, girls and women also collected wild foods in the forest with the same synergistic sensuality that enlivened garden life in communities more horticulturally focused. In both cases sensual seductiveness increased in the face of choice foods. [\[Back\]](#)
11. Synchronous cooperation punctuated by playful surprise triggering ecstasy was an outstanding feature of the forest-dwelling hunting-gathering-gardening youths. It kept their collective hearts synchronized and elated. [\[Back\]](#)
12. The names Awa' and 'Fore' were imposed by Australian government officials later. No such regional, linguistic or ethnic names existed among the original Neolithic population. The situation was of customs, languages and practices adapting into one another along lines of contact without distinct separations or identities. The 'Fore' got their name by virtue of Western consciousness, when, from the high overlook at Moke between what became the northern and southern Fore regions, the Australian officer-in-charge of the initial exploratory patrol gazed across the vast panorama of the Puburamba and Lamari Valleys down below and onto the dramatic grassland slopes rising up beyond the Lamari River. He asked who were the people were living there. He was told 'fore kina.' In the local language that meant 'the people living down below.' He knew that kina was the local name for 'people' and so recorded them as 'Fore.' Those 'people down below' encompassed a genetically diverse collection of hunter-gatherers, protohorticulturalists and full-time agriculturists speaking different languages and dialects. When the Lamari River later became the border of an administrative district to the east, those on the east side of the river were designated Awa' by officials of that new district. Though they considered themselves 'one-talks' with their brethren on the west site, they were said to be Awa' and to speak the Awa' language while those on the west side continued to be called 'Fore' and were said to speak the 'Fore' language. Formally these two languages belong to different language families. But due to dialect chaining across the region, the inhabitants of those hamlets in fact spoke a fusion of them both which they considered 'their language.' Depending how a linguistic investigator asked his questions, or what kind of an interpreter he had, a hamlet could be assigned to Fore by one investigator and Awa by another. Those called 'Fore' did not object, because they were flexibly accommodating regarding names. In the absence of any other regional or ethnic reference, academics, entrepreneurs and missionaries adopted the usage (and boundaries) established by the government. Thus was the ethnic and linguistic map of the region constructed. At first the 'Fore' used their new identity only when dealing with the government. Then they began referring to themselves as 'Fore' to all Westerners; then to individuals from other regions in New Guinea; and finally among themselves. A finer-grained geography was created as subregions were named and mapped by subsequent Patrol Officers in similar fashion. Although the Western sense of geography did not correspond to the original local sense, these new names gained currency as government activity increased, and most dramatically when annual censuses were instituted. Individuals were then required to annually re-present themselves at the same established census site each year. As they did so, year-after-year, their sense of affiliation with that region (and its name) got stronger. When schools were later introduced, these regional names were passed on to the young as the 'Fore' geography. The Fore people, the Fore territory and their regional subdivisions (like many others in New Guinea) were in this way formally established. [\[Back\]](#)
13. The Fore watimagi is a wing-shaped carved-wood display platform on which the maturing penises of Fore adolescents were laid out to view. The Awa tonana is a band secured around the hips beneath a copious grass skirt to keep adolescent penises obscured and down. These two items of apparel represent major cross-cultural differences in treatment of adolescent genitality. Fore boys didn't wear watimagi when active, and so and had none when they met the Awa, but their grass skirts were puny by comparison. At least one Awa boy was wearing his tonana when the two hunting groups met (Fore were still mirthfully commenting on this in 1963). [\[Back\]](#)
14. This was subsequently demonstrated in an ecological/genetic study which also shows that a similar process occurred widely throughout the highlands among many different peoples speaking many different languages (see Sorenson 1976, chapter 5). [\[Back\]](#)
15. For a particularly revealing case of such instinctive friendship among aboriginal Moken Sea Nomads in the Sea of Andaman see Sorenson (1998). [\[Back\]](#)
16. It was very different in communities to the north where consciousness was becoming supraliminal. Names lasted longer there, and initiations had begun bestowing initiation names—an emergent form of formal name. Claims on property were firming up, and kindreds had begun to formalize. Names of groups and sites were becoming more significant and more durable. Places started being named for the kinship group living there—opposite to the practice in the distant south where groups were more often

referred by the name of the site on which they happened to be living. Similarly where abstract thought and arguments were emerging, names were firmer—for people, sites and kindred. [\[Back\]](#)

17. These photographs were first standardized in Westernized populations. For the initial report of this inquiry into the recognition of emotion across cultures see Ekman et al. (1969). For a report focusing on the cross-cultural differences encountered see Sorenson (1975). [\[Back\]](#)
18. Individuals from the agricultural regions were much less sensitive. Unlike the hunter-gatherer-gardeners of the south, they were not distraught by photos showing full-blown negative emotions. [\[Back\]](#)
19. For details on this pattern of excess and restraint see Berndt (1962) and C. H. Berndt (1953). For details on the 'time-of-troubles' see Lindenbaum (1979, 1971), B. M. Glasse (1969), S. Glasse (1964), Glasse and Lindenbaum (1969). [\[Back\]](#)
20. That the earth was lightly populated principally by nomadic peoples before the rise of civilizations is generally accepted in anthropology. For a recent comprehensive summation of the socio-ecological development of the world in the 13,000 years since the most recent Ice Age see Diamond (1997). On a broad canvas, he traces a world that moved from universal nomadism to virtually universal settlement largely as a result of agriculture. For it was with agriculture that came stored resources, large populations, surplus labor, centralized power and all the other, some not so pleasant, trappings of civilization. Agriculture came on spottily, here and then there, some places being more easily adaptable to early tilling than others. Of the plenty of good potential agricultural regions in the early world, Diamond explains why the fertile crescent of the Mediterranean Basin (from Gibraltar to the Middle East) was one of the best (its climate, topography and the opportune diversity of its plants and animals). This is the area I refer to here as *Mediterranea*. It includes all the regions draining into the Mediterranean and is where Western Civilization had its earliest beginnings. [\[Back\]](#)
21. For a comprehensive presentation of the history of governments beginning about 3200 B.C. see *Finer* (1997). [\[Back\]](#)
22. This insight comes from numerous in-close personal contacts with both the land-oriented Sea Nomads that *White* (1922) contacted as well with the aboriginal type he did not. The latter avoids contact with postconquest people. For an unusual account of a month in residence on a Moken nomad craft of this latter

shyer type see *Sorenson* (1998). This more aboriginal type scrupulously evades contact with commerce, avoiding even those semi-acculturated Moken, using obscure routes to bypass areas harboring these modern perturbations to their gentle lifestyle. [\[Back\]](#)

23. In this connection it is illuminating to peruse *Sheets-Johnstone's* (1996) elaborately reasoned analysis of the effect of a culture's symbolism on what researchers in one culture say about people in another. She critiques two major research bodies that distinguish Neanderthal from *Homo sapiens*. Asking whether we can justly say we know Neanderthals if we know them in anything other than 'in their own terms,' she makes a compelling argument for techniques of inquiry that bridge awareness differences among various forms of humanity. She argues:

Words or phrases such as 'symbolism,' 'symbolic behavior,' and 'symbolic codes' have a patently compelling aura about them—they are honorific, they straightaway signify intellectual acumen—and on first glance, we may think we understand what is being said. When we carefully examine what is being said, however, dear, reasonable meaning is nowhere to be found, either in the terms or phrases separately or as a unit (op. cit., p. 37).

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24. For variations on the importance of experience see *Blair and Prattis* (1997). They deal comprehensively with the effect of experience on consciousness and of cognition on awareness in an anthology setting forth perspective-altering experiences that have influenced anthropologists. They also touch on logico-centric rationalism versus *erocentric* experience, feelings versus rationalization and the impact of *mythos*, *eros* and *logos* on mentality. In his own chapter in the anthology *Prattis* counterpoises dialectics and experience within the poetic dimensions of experience. *Young and Goulet* (1994) bring a variety of accounts together detailing the impact of extraordinary experience in cross-cultural encounters. They leave little doubt about the importance of personal experience in cross-cultural understanding. *Laughlin* (1994) shows the crucial importance of transpersonal experience in the understanding of Tibetan *Dumo* Yoga practice: A clear example of the need for modes of inquiry that go beyond current techniques of logic and language. [\[Back\]](#)

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