

Through Western Eyes
or How My Balinese Neighbour Became a Duck

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In taking as my theme tonight the philosophical ideas of an Indonesian people I am guilty of what the Balinese would call *nasikin segara*, adding salt to the sea.¹ That is, I am making a negligible contribution to a subject on which much of this audience knows more than I. For this I offer my apologies and a justification. Although this may be obvious to an Indonesian audience, there is a reason for considering the kinds of philosophical assumption a people use in understanding their own culture. For the possibility that their own models may not be adequate to understand everything about other cultures raises ructions, or simply meets with disbelief, in most academic circles. Whatever the pretensions otherwise we see the world through Western eyes.

In presenting my argument clearly and unequivocally I shall fall short of the Indonesian ideal of steering between extremes. For, at times, I shall veer closer to another common figure: an orator pleading his case. I am aware in so doing of being *sekadi I Bongkoh nyujuh langit*, like a dwarf reaching for the sky. Perhaps there are occasions though when it is better to try and fail than not to try at all.

As some of you may find my sub-title odd, to say the least, may I explain? During a discussion with Balinese villagers the strange case was brought to our attention of a respectable, but poor, high-caste lady who had metamorphosed into a white duck. There will be more on this shortly. What is crucial is that the debate which ensued as to whether this unfortunate lady were a duck or an aristocrat highlights the difference between Western (or at least English) and Balinese notions of what is meant by identity, person, action, and so forth. I shall suggest that, if we reflect a little on the implications of this example and others like it, something of the possible importance of indigenous philosophies in an understanding of culture can be seen. This is not, I submit, merely an issue for academics in their (metonymic, one presumes!) ivory towers – ivy-covered professors in ivy-covered halls, as Tom Lehrer once put it – but one which is central to any serious attempt to understand another culture. To see other societies through Western eyes – that is through spectacles with lenses moulded for the most part by Greek philosophy and Judaeo-Christian religion – is not, in a serious sense, to understand at all.

This brings me to the core of my argument. I suggest that the Western academic industry has failed, in certain vital ways, to understand cultures other than its own, in this instance, Indonesia. Further, this is due to the imposition of categories and assumptions from one philosophical tradition on to ideas and actions given order by another. I shall attempt to substantiate this charge by showing, even if briefly, how far Balinese culture is widely understood by its members in the light of presuppositions, which differ from ours significantly in their history and emphases. For instance, the Balinese appear to hold quite distinct views as to what exists and how it can be known. This comes out in ideas of identity. The pragmatic trend in Balinese thinking is reflected in the close connection between thoughts and the body, so that for various reasons (what we are accustomed to call) mind may be treated as an aspect of human action. More stress is placed on behaviour than is allowed in most accounts of Balinese culture, where what men do is often treated as the sequestered shadows of some Platonic pig-farm in which only the privileged pedagogue wallows.

To grasp the possible significance of a study of indigenous philosophy, it is instructive to look at the kinds of place given to the participants' explanations of their own culture as against the observers' model. Anthropologists vary in this. Fortunately, few are as extreme as Leach who, in the light of at least one analyst's superior knowledge, dismisses peoples'

¹ This is the text of the Indonesia Circle Anniversary Lecture given on 11 March 1981.

own ideas simply as ‘nonsense’ (1954: 14). If it is considered at all, the issue is often phrased by analogy with linguistics as the difference between the *emic* (from phonemic), or participants’ model, and an *etic* (from phonetic) observer’s construction. As the Balinese are wont to remark: analogies are enlightening but false. The trouble is that culture is not a language, no matter how useful the parallel, and where this last does not hold the result is plain confusing. Another drawback is that more than might seem is smuggled under the skirts of the two kinds of model. The deathless debate on the universality of rationality makes the point that it is not uncommon to compare what the other does with what one ought to do oneself (the case is well put by Horton 1967). Another favourite ploy is to shift the classification of ‘the symbolic’ and ‘the literal’ like Chinese screens. By the time that the picture has been clouded with strained dichotomies like ideal and actual, symbolic and literal (real, practical, etc.), truth and interpretation and so on, one would not be surprised to see a cultural conjuror cut the problem in half and leave both ends wiggling happily.

A nasty problem of observers’ models is that it is often not clear if, and if so how, they are separate from cultural interpretations. One popular argument holds that cultural statements (one trusts some, not all!) refer not to their ostensible subject but in some ‘realler’ sense to society (see Skorupski 1976 on two versions of this). Balinese villagers neatly put this Durkheimian thesis in perspective. When they invited me to pray at a local temple, I asked what I was expected to believe about the god in order for it to be proper for me to worship there. They dismissed my grounds for concern by pointing out that really knowing about gods was not possible for mere men and praying was just a way of showing respect for the community (Bateson 1949 records similarly explicit references to society as the focus of concern). Another school of thought which imputes inferior understanding to the native is the brand of functionalism which leaves intended actions and consequences to the poor actors, but regards their unintended implications as the analysts’ pre-serve. This muddles intention and recognition. The Balinese, for instance, are quite aware of the effects of a growing population on demand for land, but did not intend these in taking advantage of medical facilities. It is ill advised anyway to base any argument on so slippery a notion as consciousness, which comes, like graduates, in degrees.

This is not ‘much ado about nothing’ (as the much-maligned Marvin Harris correctly noted². To the extent that the observers’ models make use of indigenous ones the problems arise not only as to what these latter are but also how they are to be articulated to the former. The difficulties in this kind of mating are formidable, but largely inevitable. There is precious little one can say about another culture without reference to its categories. Most arguments, in fact, are unwitting hybrids. And like the *bengkiwa*, the unfortunate cross between a Balinese (*bèbèk*) and a Manila (*kirik*) duck, the result is not only infertile but has a most ungainly waddle.

² Harris (1969) rightly notes the danger of confusing indigenous (*emic*) and observers’ (*etic*) models, but less adequately uses this to try to argue that analysis can be carried out at the latter level alone. His example of Bahian fishing-boat captains neatly makes the case against him. These men express their ability to locate shoals of fish in a native trigonometric idiom. Harris also notes that successful captains also have distinctive social attitudes and attributes (like hard work, etc.). Is he seriously trying to maintain that the Bahians are unaware of such distinctive features or regard any connection as pure chance? It is here that uncomfortable assumptions creep in. It is presupposed that, if a people have one idiom, they are incapable of appreciating another. More seriously Harris’s observer’s analysis relies heavily on indigenous models. It is no use saying that the real, causal explanation is something like hard work and this is entirely separate from native categories. How hard a man works is part of his cultural perception and evaluation of self.

There is a twist, however. Is there only one actors' model? And, should there be more, of what do they consist, and how do they differ? Further, what has all this to do with the study of indigenous philosophies? Such questions need asking, but raise such broad issues that here I only have the time to sketch out some tentative thoughts.

One of the more unsightly uses of Occam's Razor is to cut out much of the complexity of indigenous ideas. This misplaced parsimony often takes the form of looking for some ideal scheme to be rescued from the rubbish of what people do and say. It is no bad thing to question this approach. The debate on whether there is a single universal rationality (Lukes 1967; Hollis 1967) has pointed to the kinds of variation which seem to exist (Bloch 1977; Parkin 1976). The Balinese ethnography also suggests that villagers and priests work with several different styles of interpretation and constitutive metaphors (Hobart 1979, 1980). This does not weaken my argument for studying indigenous philosophical ideas. Rather, the possible existence of alternative models invites questions about differences in rationality (understood as encompassing the often confused issues of logic, empirical truth, consistency, and so on) and a host of further topics.

So pervasive has been the concern with fitting the material from other cultures to Western intellectual schemes that there has been remarkably little inquiry into indigenous models.³ Gazing hopefully at 'the facts' does not help much; for these are generally compatible with more than one interpretation (the problem of the under-determination of theory by experience: Quine 1960; Hookway and Pettit 1978). Also there is increasing evidence that, even in supposedly scientific areas, perception of 'reality' is structured by paradigms (Kuhn, 1962) or metaphors (Masterman, 1970; Ortony, 1979; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), which are culturally specific. So my use of the notion of native model is deliberately loose, because quite simply until we start looking we do not know what is going on.

There are two obvious objections to my argument. First, that I am merely substituting some partly coherent notion of metaphysics for an ideal cultural model as the key to explanation. Second, that no evidence any ethnographer can produce can ever invalidate theoretical conceptual models. To argue this is, however, to misunderstand the enterprise. My concern is with how the Balinese use, and talk about, philosophical ideas in acting and in explaining their own culture. I am not looking for some grand metaphysical scheme that will explain Balinese culture. I doubt if it exists. What I wish to explore is the ways in which different groups or kinds of people articulate what they are doing in terms of what they see as relevant native philosophical ideas. Such ideas are then part of the ethnography and how they are used is a matter of investigation. Ethnography of itself does not prove the irrelevance of theoretical schemes. What does question their applicability is that they are incapable of explaining much of what happens in Balinese social life. They say more in the end about the observer than about what he is looking at.

This leads us to a rather surprising position. The description and analysis of other cultures involves two different systems of thought to a degree which is not always recognized. With this the problem of translation rears its ugly head again. Worse, we must consider the dangers of cultural bias hidden beneath the guise of scholarship. To the extent

³ Unfortunately when I gave this talk the paper by Gudeman and Penn arguing cogently against the domination of what they call 'universal models' in anthropological thought was not available. They show elegantly the inherent weaknesses in 'much of our purported theorizing and argue for the need to look at "local models"' (Gudeman and Penn, 1982). By models here I do not mean simply inquiry into native classifications in ethno-methodology, although this has a relevance that is sometimes not fully appreciated.

that the interpretations of its cultures over the last centuries have their basis in alien cultural and philosophical values, it may be argued that Indonesia has been subjected to a colonialism subtler than anything economic, political, and military. What followed the sword was not only trade, but ideas. In the long run Indonesia may have been changed more effectively by alien assumptions than it ever could have been by the political or economic effects of an outside capitalism, socialism, or what have you. To look at, let alone treat with, cultures with such different historical and philosophical roots is to distort – the more so the less this is recognized. It is no defence for Western academics to plead ignorance of their own cultural presuppositions, any more than for a surgeon to apologize for forgetting his anatomy training. An Indonesian proverb puts the matter nicely:

seperti katak di bawah tempurung

like a frog under a coconut shell, whose knowledge of the world beyond is as little as he believes it to be all-embracing. One wonders to whom this applies?

Let me be clear as to the brunt of my argument. I am not saying that we must fall into a relativism where there is no escape from the culture in question, nor yet that Western scholarship is without value. Both statements would be absurd. And Indonesia has had its share of sensitive study. Rather, as I think the Balinese might agree, a little self-reflection does no harm. We can remind ourselves therapeutically of the potential weaknesses and limitations in our own arguments. This said, let me throw caution to the winds for a moment. Actually it is more likely to be *berludah ke atas*, spitting upwards – an act which tends to have unfortunate consequences for the spitter.

So far certain brands of anthropology have been my target. At the risk of speaking in ignorance, I would like in passing to see how my reservations might affect other subjects. For instance I am not aware that economists have paid much attention to the possible existence of indigenous economic models. How far do their views of profit, surplus, resources, or scarcity in fact allow for the actors' categories? Geography is open to similar criticism. The analysis of ecology, agricultural production, and population largely ignores the degree to which folk classification and models of action and causation mediate the factors between which geographers search for correlations. (My favourite is a study which derived the incidence of birth control from the pattern of land ownership.) One might equally question how far political studies can go without considering Indonesian ideas of power (cf. Anderson 1972 who notes one little-studied aspect). How far can jurisprudence go without reflecting on the conceptions of order, morality, and so forth?

With some justice the humanities sometimes regard themselves as less naïve than the social sciences. Historians, curiously, may be the more vulnerable the greater their claims. For a discipline in which the significance of the relation between antecedent and subsequent events is central, it is worth remark that there is not a more open discussion on how ideas of time, causality, intention, or necessity might affect their subject (but cf. Ricklefs 1978; Worsley 1972). Might philologists not reflect on how far we can evaluate their contributions in the absence of studies on the significance of figures of speech for an understanding of meaning, or the status of truth in spoken discourse, text, and theatre?⁴ It may be my ignorance, but I have not yet encountered a detailed study of Indonesian cultural theories of grammar, syntax, or semantics. In making these sweeping assertions

⁴ Some clue as to how much Javanese ideas of theatre may differ is shown by Becker (1979). The importance of views about truth in Bali and Java is discussed in Hobart n.d.; and the relevance of different conceptions of meaning for an understanding of discourse in Hobart (1982).

my aim is not to denigrate existing scholarship but to point, if a little dramatically, to how hard it may be to evaluate our findings if we do not recognize a cultural context which may include indigenous philosophical ideas.

What on earth do I mean though in talking about philosophy and meta- physics? It is not dissimilar, I think, from what Evans-Pritchard seems to have had in mind when he urged anthropologists not to focus narrowly on religious belief and practice, but rather on philosophy as a *Weltanschauung* (Evans-Pritchard 1954: 314). As this has become something of a catchall, metaphysics might be defined better as what deals with

the concepts of existence, thing, property, event; the distinctions between particulars and universals, individuals and classes; the nature of relations, change, and causation; and the nature of mind, matter, space and time (Hancock 1967: 289-90).

Besides metaphysics, philosophy is intended to include the range of concerns from epistemology through ethics to kinds of logical reasoning in whatever form they may occur. Just as philosophers are loth to define a subject matter, so it might be best to understand a stress on indigenous philosophizing as a way of looking at things.

Some will protest that philosophy in cultures like Bali is simply a part of religion or culture. This is, I suspect, to fall into a common trap. Anthropologists tend to focus with great enthusiasm on the more dramatic and bizarre ‘bits’ of culture, whether action or words. One of the difficulties with inductive argument is how we decide which are the relevant bits in the first place, and how to tell them from other bits. Anyway, culture is not a thing. And it does not come in bits – is this why one is tempted to speak, for instance of ‘the polity as a concrete social institution’ (shades of Manhattan waistcoats!) or of ‘a concrete example’ (Geertz 1980:10, 31)? There is no theory-free way of observing things in the world, far less culture. The stress on philosophy is a way of saying that we need to focus on the ways a people set about understanding their world. In this sense, philosophizing is a social activity and not, as the anthropologist tends to misrender it, gazing at things in the hope that they will reveal some inner truth. Phrased this way the stress may be new, the concern is not. Moliere’s *bourgeois gentilhomme* discovered (appropriately from a professor of philosophy!) that he had been speaking prose all his life. After all, in talking about other cultures, we have been using philosophical distinctions without being aware of it – or worse, not declaring it!

Others will complain that it is meaningless to speak of philosophy outside formal traditions of full-time reflective scholarship. This is not unlike Humpty Dumpty saying that words mean what he wanted them to mean. If this is not a kind of solipsism, it certainly prejudices the issue. It also tends to treat philosophy as a special preserve of thinkers divorced from its social context. In fact, in making my argument for much of Indonesia, this point is not strictly necessary as there is a long history of critical discussion in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. On the other hand my material is drawn here not from brahmanical reflection, nor debate in royal courts, but from ordinary villagers. (In fact my most constant informants were a truck driver, a market porter, a flower seller, and two peasants, of whom only one had completed basic school.) We could do worse than consider the conditions under which a concern with understanding the world is in the hands of specialists as opposed to a common, if necessarily sporadic, activity.

Do the Balinese though have ways of distinguishing what I have? What we term religion, is after all, a large and ill-defined field. The Balinese recognize *agama* which they understand variously (van der Tuuk 1897-1912), but usually to do with rites or God. This is distinct from *tutur*, differently described as advice, edifying literature, or by the

Indonesian term *filosofat*, philosophy. Knowledge of *agama* is seen as the specialty of priests. Other forms of cultural knowledge are more open, as in fact must be the case if there is to be a measure of understanding. There is a large body of shared assumptions: about what exists, what is desirable or appropriate, or what is indeed knowable. How far different social groups differ in particulars is a matter of investigation. However, just as M. Jourdain had been speaking prose without knowing it, so Balinese villagers have been philosophizing. . If we think of culture as a chorus of consensus, we may be gulled into looking at the ‘bits’ at the expense of what people are doing. What is striking to me is how far it is agreed that men will dispute how things should be understood, and elements as diverse as religious precepts, implicit analogies, and popular proverbs may be sought as keys to reflection.

One of the most pervasive, but not straightforward, images is that of hierarchy. Balinese use it to classify the world and men in various ways. Two forms are central to the present discussion: the organization of knowledge and of being. The ability to know things is widely thought to be unequally distributed. Animals can know little, if anything; men are graded variously by their knowledge; while unmanifest beings rank highest. One of the ways of defining Supreme Being, or Divinity, is as perfect knowledge in which all the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies perceived by humbler forms are resolved. Humility is a corner stone of Balinese ideas about what they can know. To strive for, let alone claim, omniscience is badly to misunderstand one’s place. Divine revelation and inspiration, as against the ideal of reason in Western thought, should perhaps be understood against this background. When the Balinese show unease in carrying ideas to their logical conclusion, this may be because they are aware that experience may confound cultural assertions and their implications. The Balinese are pragmatic and dislike counting angels on pinheads. Significantly, what is experienced is also linked to states of being. These are commonly conceived as ranked by degrees of coarseness (*kasar*) or subtlety (*alus*). The effect is that the hierarchy of knowledge is often represented as closely parallel to the hierarchy of being, so that the less corporeal the being, the greater the ability to know truly what is what. My impression is that neither the idiom, nor the connection, is unquestionable; but both are used commonly.

This epistemological humility has another face. The Balinese language allows distinction of degrees of certainty. And they are used with a precision which would do those who study the Balinese proud. Words for knowing are set apart from those for believing. To know something, *uning* (in high Balinese, *nawang* in low) is to have evidence that it is so. There is a weaker term, *meturah-turahan* used of trying to make something out in the half-light, which might be glossed as ‘guess’ as it implies poor grounds for an assertion. Along the same scale are two other terms: *mirib* and *minab* usually given as ‘possibly’ and ‘probably’ but both (having potential verb forms) are often treated as degrees of likelihood between pure guessing and knowing. Following Needham’s sceptical remarks (1972), we must approach words for belief with care. Loosely, though, it seems as if the Balinese use the verb *ngega* (in high; *ngugu* in low) to imply a conviction backed by evidence, and *pracaya* as a kind of commitment where evidence is weak or absent (cf. Gonda, 1952).⁵ Anthropologists are prone to ask questions

⁵ Without wishing to unravel the complex world of Balinese epistemology, one might add a third obvious aspect: how something appears, *ngenah(né)*. From what little has been said, certain distinctive features emerge. Things appear in different lights; knowing about them requires perspective – that is looking at things from different angles at different times. While the ‘believe’ words suggest a measure of personal relevance, in a different way degrees of knowing are almost like illocutionary force markers, which make

like ‘does a person believe in God?’ In Bali this has odd results. Most people *pracaya* and most priests *ngega*. I wonder which of the terms above were translated as ‘belief’ in all those accounts which purport to tell us what the Balinese believe?

The moral is not merely that we must be less arrogant in translating but, if what we say is not to be sheer flatulence, we need to know about a culture’s criteria of truth. Other similar mistakes are made by anthropologists with an indecent enthusiasm matched only by the happy certitude of their own insights. How many observers have considered the kinds of sense on which Balinese base assertions about the world? All my informants agreed that senses are ranked hierarchically. Sight is universally held the most important and reliable; hearing the least. The illustration I was often given was between seeing a cow walking in the road wearing a cowbell, as against merely hearing a cow-bell. The latter might be a cow or a small boy playing. Behind this is a rather subtle grasp of the implications of language as well. The Balinese do not dispute the power of words to convey information; they simply note that speech can as easily lie as tell the truth. To hear something, or hear of it, is therefore never to know, it is just to know that one has heard (*uning sampun miragi*). As I am not aware of any reference to such subtleties in Balinese statements, I must confess to slight worries as to how many scholars even knew they existed. One dreads to think what lies behind all those comfortable assertions reported of the Balinese.

As this is all a little abstract, let me give an example. The late distinguished Balinese scholar, Dr Hooykaas, used to lament that the Balinese did not know the meanings of their innumerable offerings. When I asked them, I met with a similar response. After inquiring into their categories of knowing, however, I reformulated my question using the weak *meturah-turahan* not the strong *uning*. To my astonishment the silence gave way to an outpouring of suggestions. We may indeed have to rethink our assumptions about the link between word and action, or speech and text for instance, in other cultures. If the visual has such pride of place, what do masks signify in dance and theatre, or the shadow in the Balinese puppet theatre? It looks as if it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that failure to consider the differences in epistemology may mean much of the literature on Bali is *gado-gado* (a mish-mash of vegetables and a common Indonesian dish).

This brief discussion may go some way, I hope, towards justifying my earlier, and rather sweeping criticisms about academic complacency. Might I leave this topic though with an intriguing issue? Anthropologists are about as united in agreeing that society has symbolic aspects as they are divided in how these should be understood. Curiously it is impossible to ask if something is ‘symbolic’ in Bali, not because they lack a term (the Indonesian loan-word *simbol* does fine), but because the field of signification is split up into a number of technical terms which dissect our general term of symbol. In other words I have a suspicion that questions like ‘what does it symbolize?’ or even ‘what does it mean?’ may be more products of Western lexical and semantic categories than useful, tools in the analysis of other cultures.

In order to illustrate my argument, let me consider briefly how Balinese ideas of knowledge may be linked with their views of personal identity and action. This brings me at last to the sad story of the lady who became a duck.

explicit how the speaker feels about what he says. My thanks are due to Professor Mischa Penn for his invaluable help in clarifying my mind in discussion.

At about eight o'clock one evening several villagers were sitting over coffee discussing the news, which one of them had recounted. On his way there, the speaker said, he had passed a white duck standing in the road in front of the compound of a poor high-caste widow in her forties, by the name of Désak Nyoman Kawit. To his great surprise the duck addressed him in perfect Balinese and called him by name. The duck asked for his help; and then told the following story. That afternoon she, Désak Nyoman Kawit, had gone to take a nap and had woken to find herself covered in feathers and very small. After some time she had come to realize from what people were saying that she must look like a duck and this was, indeed, borne out by what she could see of her own body. That the speaker said, was the duck's story.

As the evening wore on the story was repeated to the new arrivals who joined the group. The discussion hinged on the issue of whether, if the duck's story was true, the duck was Désak Nyoman Kawit or not. The problem was approached in various ways. Among the prevailing questions was if it were possible for a duck to have the speech – and so it might be the thoughts – of a human being, as the duck claimed. Could the duck be treated as a person and, if so, did it have the rights Désak Nyoman Kawit had previously enjoyed? This involved consideration of such issues as her rights in the village council as well as more frivolous contributions such as whether she should be cremated rather than made into roast duck!

While this issue and others were being argued around, a noted orator and local expert on custom turned up. He listened to the full story impassively as had the others before him and asked a few questions to clarify various points. He then said that, as the duck was not capable of carrying out the duties of a village member, nor those of a householder, there were no grounds for allowing the duck any status other than duck.

Even if it were Désak Nyoman Kawit, there was no evidence other than the duck's statement, and furthermore with a duck's body it could do nothing other than what ducks do. This effectively brought the discussion to a close.

This is a résumé of some two hours' heated debate and cannot do justice to the complexities of the issues discussed. It is, however, enough for my present limited purpose.

It is only fair to give a little background. I have presented the case first, however, as that is how it was enacted before the villagers. Earlier in the evening I had been talking over problems of personal identity with a few villagers and to make my point clearer, I had tried to illustrate it by asking what they would think if a person became a duck, or – to be as accurate as the Balinese were – if a duck stated that it was a person!⁶ For some reason the example appealed to my audience. In order that the issue be discussed seriously, they argued, it must be presented as true to whoever happened to wander in. They therefore told the story to each of several newcomers with straight faces and a panache, which says much about Balinese impromptu theatrical skills.

On some other occasion I hope to consider all the nuances of the case in full. Even from this skeletal treatment several points emerge:

1. The consensus was that, in order to elicit a serious response, it was necessary to

⁶ When I wrote this talk, to my regret I had not read Amélie Rorty (1976). Rather than plunge into the ethnography in search of essential features of identity to be revealed in names or whatever, she shows with some elegance how far one can appreciate identity by looking at the literary definitions of human individuality and what one might loosely call the dialectics between literature and society in changing formulations of what men are held to be. This has, I suspect, great potential for anthropologists but sadly is beyond the scope of this paper.

- present the example not as make-believe but as having taken place.
2. Rather than my initial account of Désak Nyoman Kawit having become a duck, my companions rephrased this as a duck having spoken to someone and laying claim to be the high-caste lady.
 3. Each villager who came in and heard the story sat silent and weighed it up, asking questions where necessary to establish what the known facts were. (I deliberately avoid attributing my evaluation of emotions or beliefs to them.)
 4. The view, which prevailed after discussion, was that personal identity was inextricably linked to the body. This was confirmed in a different way later when I used Shoemaker's famous example of who is who if two people have their brains - here implying also their minds, that is memories, character traits, and so on - switched while their bodies remain the same. Every Balinese informant to date has stated that, asked to choose, they would regard personal identity as linked to the body not to the thoughts as evinced in utterances, action, and so forth.
 5. The issue was settled to the satisfaction of most by the argument that, as the duck could not carry out the work or the other actions expected of a human, regardless of any claim on the duck's part, she could not claim to be a person. Action in the end, or at least the ability to fulfil obligations as well as claim rights, carried the day.

There are other points, but these will suffice.

However diverting or trivial my example, it illustrates some of the ways in which Balinese set about thinking about their world. For instance, the villagers promptly rephrased my imaginary case. First, stories that are not held to have happened are seen as rather pointless (they could never understand my penchant for allegory). Second, they split my sloppy account into various kinds of statement with more or less direct evidence. A serious issue was whether the duck's testimony, as given to one witness, were enough in the absence of firm evidence of her transformation. This critical attitude to knowledge is linked in interesting ways to ideas of identity, which differ from popular Western notions. Identity is closely linked to the body. This is not just in terminology: two common terms for self in speech are *awaké* or *iraga*, both referring to the body (in low and high Balinese respectively). The relation of human desires and intentions to the body is complex. The point the Balinese stressed, however, was that intention changes over time, and desire may be satisfied or switch objects; whereas the human body also changes, but, barring extraordinary events (like burning, accidents, etc.), people recognize one another over reasonable periods of time by their appearance (or attributes of body, such as movement, the tone of voice, and so on), not by the typical propositions uttered by the body. It may only be among academics that people are so stagnant that one can recognize the man from the argument!

The stress on the body as the focus, so to speak, of the self allows an interesting interpretation of a set of assertions which would otherwise be rather puzzling. The ideal religious goal of human existence in the Balinese version of Hinduism is attaining liberation, *moksa*, from the cycle of reincarnation – an end as valued in principle as it is considered irrelevant to the humdrum of peasant life. The test of true *moksa*, as against ordinary death (including the now-notorious 'bad death' reported for Indonesian peoples), is appropriately visual – the body disappears into thin air. As *moksa* is the destruction of human identity, it can be argued that such a view is necessary. This also touches on broader questions about death and ideas of continuity on which time does not permit me to speak now. I would merely note in passing that the term the Balinese use to speak of continuity of the self through death, the hereafter, and rebirth is *atma*. In Nyaya-Vaisesika metaphysics, at least according to Potter (1977), *atman* is glossed as self rather than soul. (The Balinese term derives from the Indian.) The implications of questioning our facile,

and imprecise, use of ‘soul’ to translate almost any native words for the non-manifest part of self are serious. Accounts which run something like: ‘The Bongo-Bongo believe that their souls...’ are too common. It may well be the ethnographer who is talking palpable nonsense not the poor native who must carry the white man’s burden.

In one sense the Balinese emphasize action, rather than objects or actors.⁷ This might seem contrary to my point about the body as focus of identity. Form and action are not, in ‘fact, unrelated. The Hindu law of *karma* is known in Bali as *karma pala*, the fruits of action. It provides a frame of reference to link a person’s state to his past actions. One of the main ways it may be used is as a principle of transformation, which links form to behaviour. Serious defective births are often attributed to misdeeds in past lives. This may throw light on the general rule that physical deformities, *mala*, are bad in some way and incompatible with roles of which a certain moral standard is expected, like priests and princes. The body in Balinese thought does not seem to derive its nature mechanically from the sum of past exchanges as has been argued for India (Inden 1976; Marriott 1976) but the history of characteristics may be argued to leave its imprint.

This may look rather like discovering the obvious. It is all too easy to find similar sentiments expressed in popular thought, proverbs, or what you will in England and elsewhere. This misses the point. European views on identity seem to be linked closely with mind, or even brain, rather than body, not just among philosophers but, for what it is worth, from a straw poll which I have been conducting for my own amusement among students, acquaintances, strangers on trains, and so forth. The relationship between character and action is illustrative rather than constitutive, at least in comparison to the Balinese. (After all it is possible for us to say that a man is acting out a character, which would sound decidedly odd in Bali.) As far as I can tell, the Balinese tend to note that actions, and what motivates a person, may change for all kinds of reasons, without having to infer some essential ‘character’ as if it were the invisible shadow puppeteer on which all else hung. Sin may lie for Christians in the intention; for the Balinese it is known mainly through the act. This is not because the Balinese deny intention, far from it. Children are excused breaches on the grounds that they do not understand and cannot be responsible for their intentions – the same holds for idiots and Europeans. When something hangs on the outcome however, intention is unknowable in itself. Action is not. The Balinese would not, I suspect, agree with Wilde about action that

It is the last resource of these who know not how to dream.

This talk has hardly been a systematic disquisition upon my subject. I have tried to raise questions more than answer them. If nothing else, I hope a sceptical glance at how we translate and try to understand other cultures has been refreshing. Some may find the message depressing, as it makes it less easy to build theoretical sandcastles from a few grains of sand. If it has raised any spectres, I hope it may be that outsiders in Bali have not so much held up a mirror to the nature of Bali as to themselves. The mirror may be apt. For those who gaze into it the only escape is, as for the Lady of Shalott, watered and in death. Matters may be more cheerful though. Beyond the walls of our present confines worlds are waiting about which we know little because we have been seeing them through Western eyes. So it is fitting to leave the last words to the Balinese in two linked proverbs.

⁷ For the body this is made plain in the cultural importance of the correct orientation of the body in space. It should be noted, however, that this is not so much stasis as moving within space as culturally constructed in a manner fitting one’s status at the time; see Hobart (1978).

Belan pané, belan paso; Ada kéné, ada kèto

There are those who incline this way, there are those who incline that.

Celebingkah di batan biu; Gumi linggah ajak liu

Broken potsherds under a banana palm) the world is broad
and contains many people with different ideas.

One wonders if more need be said.

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