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**Book Review Forum [page 4]**

We are pleased to present the following Review Forum of Harvey Whitehouse's book, *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 204 pages. ISBN 0-19-823414-7 (cloth); 0-19-823415-5 (paper). We have given the contributors and the book's author sufficient space to discuss its themes carefully and thus make a significant contribution to the further analysis of religion and ritual generally.

Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, Co-editors *Journal of Ritual Studies*

Reviews of this book by:

Brian Malley, Pascal Boyer, Fredrik Barth, Michael Houseman, Robert N. McCauley, Luther H. Martin, Tom Sjoblom, and Garry W. Trompf

Reply by Harvey Whitehouse

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*Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Harvey Whitehouse, Oxford Univ. Press, 2000)

Reviewed by *Brian Malley* (Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan)  
[pages 5-7]

A friend of mine, a dedicated post-everything-ist, once wistfully remarked that she had an affinity for those old-style "big theories" of religion characteristic of late nineteenth century social thought. I knew what she meant: those "big theories" strove to account both for the form and the very existence of religious belief and practice in terms of a grand scheme of human history. A century of ethnographic and historical investigation has given us a much richer understanding of both large- and small-scale religions, and, to the degree that Mueller, Durkheim, and the like produced empirically tractable theories, they have been disconfirmed. The grand theories have been replaced by a host of more specialized notions, each taking in a smaller purview. The magnificent, simple-minded brachiosaurs have been replaced by the humbler, better informed, chipmunks. Yet our continuing fascination with the dinosaurs (and occasional bold attempts to make new ones) suggests that there remains a need for grand theory, for some account of religion as a whole. Or—because there is, after all, a good reason why chipmunks replace brachiosaurs—for an account that ties together various religious phenomena in an interesting way.

Harvey Whitehouse does not give us a grand theory, but he takes us further than we have been. *Arguments and Icons* sets out, in greater detail, Harvey Whitehouse's theory of two modes of religiosity first advanced in his ethnography *Inside the Cult*. The imagistic mode is characterized by low-frequency, non-

discursive, intense religious experiences that bond small communities; the doctrinal mode is characterized by repetitive, heavily discursive, low-intensity religious experiences that tend to produce a hierarchically organized abstract community. In *Arguments* Whitehouse argues that his theory identifies and plausibly explains the cargo-cult-like splinter groups that have characterized Melanesian religious history, at least for the relatively brief period that that history is known. He further proposes that these two modes of religiosity will be found in other traditions as well, and that the imagistic mode may even be traced into prehistory, playing an important role in the political complexification of human societies.

The challenge to dichotomous theories like Whitehouse's is always to preserve the integrity of the types and to theorize the distinction between them. The first question is whether one can really distinguish imagistic and doctrinal modes "on the ground". That one can in fact do so is suggested by a good deal of evidence, not least of which is that Whitehouse's dichotomy so closely resembles the dichotomies arrived at by previous generations of ethnographers working in other regions, on other traditions. The convergence between various analysts' dichotomies strongly suggests that they are onto something important. Whitehouse is very much aware of standing on the shoulders of giants, and carefully articulates how his delineation improves upon previous ones. In showing how his dichotomy redresses the empirical shortcomings of earlier ones, he makes the most of anthropology's accumulating knowledge, and inherits a formidable tradition of evidence.

The second question is how one might theorize the difference between the two modes. This, after all, is the question that most differentiates dichotomous theories, and the one that provides the crux of their empirical tractability. Whitehouse's proposal here is very clever: drawing on robust findings in experimental psychology, he argues that the religious modes differ in their transmission because of the kinds of memory that they access: the imagistic mode draws on autobiographical "flashbulb" memory; the doctrinal mode draws on rather pedestrian semantic memory. Whitehouse ingeniously shows how this very simple psychological difference has consequences for the codification, imagination, and—most surprisingly—political structure of a religious tradition. This is a very innovative, very interesting proposition. There is nothing implausible about such a simple mechanism giving rise to complex phenomena—such dynamics are ubiquitous in the physical and biological sciences—but one may still fairly ask whether memory mechanisms can really drive the entire dichotomy. Whitehouse is clear that they can, but it is difficult, from such an ethnographically rich presentation, to sort out causal links from boundary conditions within which causal links operate. The ethnographic richness of Whitehouse's argument, however, is compelling not only for the wealth of detail compiled but also for the fact that his theory brings center stage ethnographic details reported but otherwise neglected. His argument is anthropology at its best.

Whitehouse emphasizes that he is demarcating not two kinds of religions, but two modes which may be more or less present in any particular religious tradition at any particular point in its history. Indeed, one of his most interesting analyses is of the interaction between the two modes of religiosity in the cases of the Pomio Kivung and the Paliu Movement. But in general he portrays each religious mode as essentially self-sufficient: the imagistic mode seems to have existed in prehistory for millennia prior to the invention of any doctrinal traditions; he holds up (Protestant) Christianity as a clear example of the doctrinal mode sustained over centuries (though he does not deny the occurrence of imagistic local variants). So, in any tradition, either mode may be present more or less, even to the extent of dominating the tradition or being entirely absent.

This point, however, requires further clarification by Whitehouse, for in his discussion of the interaction between the modes in Melanesia he seems to argue that the interaction of the modes is actually *necessary* for the survival of the doctrinal variant:

Nevertheless, it is very probable that mainstream movements could not survive without these sporadic outbursts of splinter-group activity, at different times and places, at a local level.

Within doctrinal regimes, whenever enthusiasm for orthodox practices begins to wane in response to the strenuous round of routinized activity, there is a risk that local communities (or large portions of them) will abandon the religion altogether. Such trends have been observed on numerous occasions within Paliu's, Koriam's, and Yali's movements, and in other comparable organizations. Sometimes the defecting community is never won back. Communities that remain loyal to mainstream orthodoxy in the long run are, paradoxically, often the ones that break away temporarily during period of low morale. (pp. 128-129, cf. also p. 145).

The necessity of the modes' interaction (at least for the sake of predominantly doctrinal traditions) raises the question of how precisely this is done. Whitehouse is careful here to avoid functionalism: he makes it clear that the leaders of the doctrinal tradition oppose the temporary imagistic schisms and that the interaction does not always occur. He proposes rather that doctrinal tedium sets the stage for an imagistic recodification: "People did not go out 'looking for meaning'—it is truer to say that they were especially susceptible to it. The Plateau Phase was one in which any intrinsically compelling recodification of the prevailing orthodoxy was going to 'catch on'" (p. 142). When such a recodification came along, it spread like wildfire. Whitehouse takes seriously the problem—apparent to many of us with religious backgrounds—of tedium. The tendency, in discussions of religion, has been to emphasize the sacredness, profundity, passion, ecstasy, and danger of religious experience. To be sure, such sentiments are important. Yet in fact the experience of practicing religion is more often dull, boring, or even irritating. (It is not without reason that the "world religions" have some notion that discipline is required.) Rather than neglecting such sentiments as somehow non-genuine or spurious, Whitehouse suggests that the tedium of the doctrinal mode is an inherent destabilizing factor, creating openings for more exciting splinter movements and requiring constant investment for the preservation of doctrine.

This point, however, seems to invite an objection, especially because of his use of Protestant Christianity as his prototypical doctrinal tradition. Whitehouse's characterization of Protestant Christianity is unusually accurate, as far as it goes. He correctly recognizes that even the most Bible-oriented of Christian traditions are primarily oral in nature, thus avoiding the very common mistake of confusing Protestant epistemology with the transmission of beliefs. He also properly foregrounds the importance of doctrine in a tradition that has historically been confessional, a tradition that is, indeed, the source of our word "orthodox". One is left wondering, then, how Christianity, especially ritual-sparse conservative American Protestant Christianity, has managed not only to survive, but to thrive. Why doesn't the tedium effect take hold? Whitehouse suggests that leaders in a predominantly doctrinal religion are able to quash imagistic upstarts, but this cannot be the case among the notoriously unruly and little centralized American conservative Christians, nor has it been possible for most of Protestant history (with some notable exceptions, such as John Calvin's Geneva). Protestant leaders have generally had little real power, especially in recent history. If tedium can set in after a five or six year period, how has conservative Christianity remained so stable?

A related difficulty, I suggest, may lie with Whitehouse's interpretation of doctrinal repetitiveness. Is someone really likely to *forget* or *misremember* the doctrine of the Trinity, or the doctrine of the resurrection, if she does not hear it taught every week, or every month, or every year? An alternative hypothesis worth considering might be that the repetition serves to increase the relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995) of the notion, to prime it in memory so that people will use it in thinking about their every day lives. In fact, most sermons seek to connect doctrinal ideas with people's life situations, thus illuminating the relevance of Christian teaching for people's lives. It is this relevance which seems to me to counteract the tedium effect, and is the reason that imaginative preachers are much in demand. It may be worth considering that the survival of highly doctrinal Christianity is not due to the political exclusion of alternatives but to preachers' creative ways of linking doctrine to daily life. The repetition may be driven

less by the danger of inadvertent heresy than by the need to keep the ideas cognitively primed. Such an account of repetition is perfectly compatible with the overall dynamic proposed by Whitehouse.

*Arguments and Icons* is an important contribution to the anthropology of religion. Whitehouse has made much of religious phenomena—frequency, terror, tedium—that, while widely acknowledged, have been assigned little or no theoretical importance. His theory is very innovative, tying together findings from a variety of fields to produce an overall picture that is quite compelling. His analysis of Melanesian religion is thoroughly ethnographic, and however his proposal fares globally, it is clear that he has given us a new understanding of cargo cults and similar splinter groups in the region. But I think it likely that the two modes of religiosity will indeed prove to be quite general religious patterns, attested, with varying degrees of clarity, in widely different religious traditions. It also, I would venture, contributes to our understanding of the really big trend in religious history, the development of “world religions” and their partial displacement or assimilation of narrowly local religious traditions. Brachiosaur theories of religion are probably extinct forever, but chipmunks are not the end of evolution.

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*Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Harvey Whitehouse, Oxford Univ. Press, 2000)

Reviewed by *Pascal Boyer* (College of Arts and Sciences, Washington University, St. Louis)  
[page 8-13]

Whitehouse's brilliant book provides powerful conceptual tools that will certainly help us make better sense of religious transmission and religious dynamics. Expanding on distinctions and definitions originally presented in his monograph *Inside the Cult* (Whitehouse, 1995) he offers a broad distinction between two kinds of transmission processes, *doctrinal* and *imagistic* respectively. Religious messages are packaged, either as explicitly defended, integrated, explanatory and overtly consistent lists of propositions, or as salient, revelatory yet indescribable personal experience.

For Whitehouse, the crucial variable in the dynamics of religious systems lies in *transmission*. The background of the argument is a 'selectionist' view of human cultural evolution, as presented in theories of meme-transmission (Durham, 1991) and cultural epidemics (Sperber, 1996). The main point is that the religious concepts and norms that we find widespread in human cultures are those that resist the eroding, distorting influence of individual transmission better than others. Like other anthropologists interested in mapping and explaining the dynamics of selective transmission, Whitehouse stresses the causal role of individual *cognitive* processes. No concept or norm could get transmitted unless it was acquired, stored and transmitted by individual minds in a way that preserves its essential features. A crucial task, therefore, is to study the ways in which acquisition and memory favour specific kinds of concepts and conceptual organisation.

The psychology of memory is crucial to the argument. For there are really only two principal ways in which relatively complex sets of concepts and norms, such as those found in religious systems, could be successfully transmitted from one individual to another. One is a form of intellectual training, accumulating

a great number of relevant and explicitly connected propositions. The other one is through rare but exceptionally salient experience, so striking that its details remain engraved in memory. Each cognitive route is more appropriate to a specific kind of mental content and has specific effects on the nature of religious affiliation. The 'doctrinal' mode requires constant communication of relatively intelligible and explicitly articulated material, therefore high-frequency exposure. 'Imagistic' effects require highly salient occasions, therefore low-frequency rituals. Doctrinal practices constantly run the risk of generating as much boredom as conceptual clarity, while imagistic ones can become so incoherent that most conceptual content is lost.

By taking seriously the cognitive implications of imagistic and doctrinal practices, Whitehouse has opened up an altogether new and potentially very productive research programme in the explanation of religion. Following in Whitehouse's steps, one could derive other, equally specific predictions from the experimental evidence on episodic encoding and schemas. From this literature we learn, for instance, that the best recalled aspects of salient episodes are probably those that violate prior conceptual schemas, or that intuitively perceived danger (extensively used in initiation) will result in the encoding and easy retrieval of a whole panoply of irrelevant details of the episode. We also know that repeated rehearsal of such episodes in autobiographical memory makes them paradoxically less accurate and more schematic. So an old initiate who can perceive and understand cryptic allusions to initiation rituals in various everyday circumstances is very likely to reminisce about initiation ordeals, but rehearsal of this kind is also very likely to make his memories more schematically organised and consequently less reliable. Finally, the experimental literature gives us precise descriptions of the circumstances under which people's certainty about their memories (it *really* happened that way and the trace seems very vivid) will be inversely correlated with accuracy. So the more motivated people are to recount and recreate such experiences the less likely that anything much is preserved of the original occasion, certainly an important point for accounts of religious transmission.

Whitehouse presents the two routes to memory consolidation as not just different but exclusive. For him, each religious tradition exploits one or other mode, or both but within discrete domains of operation. He acknowledges, however, that each mode can often incorporate elements of the other: Christianity is thoroughly doctrinal but often uses music. The point is, nothing religious is transmitted through the music that cannot be explained outside this emotional medium. Also, he claims that a whole range of social, political and conceptual aspects of religious systems are the *consequences* of choosing one mode rather than the other. Modes of memory use, in this view, explain many other features of religious transmission: types of ritual action, to be sure, but also claims about metaphysical agency, forms of social organisation, extension of the putative community of believers, definition of identity, aggressive xenophobia, etc.. The argument provides, not just two contrasted ideal-types, but causal hypotheses about their constitution. As I think the argument is mostly on the right track, what I offer here is mostly an attempt to clarify the model and make it a bit leaner, perhaps less vulnerable to premature dismissal.

In Whitehouse's model, the two modes are systematic ways in which people reach religious revelations and transmit them. In other words, it is taken for granted that [a] both kinds of practices do convey some 'revelation', [b] that the latter get transmitted because people want that to happen, and [c] that revelation is precious or important because of the social bonds it creates. I find all three propositions less than compelling, but that is not the main reason for my criticism (after all, Whitehouse's intuition on these matters is as good as mine, and he does a good job at making all this plausible). What matters here is that these assumptions, which may one day be empirically justified, are not really necessary to the argument at this point and may in fact provide more hindrance than help.

That doctrinal practices do transmit information is quite clear. But the kind of 'revelation' induced by imagistic rituals seems much more difficult to describe. Whitehouse cites Herdt's claim that they provide 'focal imagery for subsequent reflection' (p. 30) and talks of moments when people receive 'lasting revelations'. But is that really the case? What is the actual evidence that Baktaman initiation for instance has

coherent cognitive effects? Whitehouse writes that 'everyday objects [?] come to be seen in a radically new light' but this is rather vague: What 'light' is that? How are everyday objects conceived of, as an effect of the ritual? True, these objects or substances have become potential reminders of a novel and salient context (fur and fat for instance may now remind you of the instruments the elders used to torture you) but I do not see any evidence that this has modified people's conceptual knowledge of everyday objects in any coherent way. In his account of Baktaman initiation, Barth talked of 'analogic codes', in other words of vague and unpredictable associations. He also showed that the main cognitive effect of the rituals was to promote an 'epistemology of secrecy', that is, the intuition that knowing more is always dangerous and painful (Barth, 1975). But that notion is triggered by the rite as a whole, it does not depend on any particular image or 'analogic' representation being used. True, in all sorts of contexts people *could* associate features of everyday activities with features of the ordeals. Indeed, such reflective exegesis is often prompted by an anthropologist's questions. But apart from such special circumstances, does it really take place and is it coherent? Perhaps imagistic rituals trigger conceptual associations that are so unpredictable and idiosyncratic that they have little in common between any two participants, except the sense that the ritual must be performed again in a similar way. I see little evidence in the ethnographic literature that would rule out this minimalist interpretation.

Whitehouse claims that imagistic rituals transmit a revelation, that this is fundamental to people's identity, so that they transmit it. But most steps in this causal chain are merely hypothesised. More parsimoniously, one might say that imagistic rituals are such that people just feel compelled to reiterate them as they occurred (or rather, as they think they occurred) the last time around. After all, in many other domains, transmission of a group's culture is independent of people's motivation. Children for instance end up speaking their language with their specific group's accent. Linguists can explain that this is caused by the way the human cortex builds up phonological skills. It has nothing to do with the motivation to be like one's elders or express one's membership in the community. True, speaking with the local accent is commonly taken by people as an *index* of membership and solidarity, but it would be a mistake to jump to the conclusion that this latter effect is the *cause* of the remarkable linguistic uniformity in small communities. In the same way, anthropologists know that participation in imagistic rituals establishes strong ties between participants as well as a sense that participation really made a difference. But we should not mistake such after-effects with the cause of repetition.

Instead of assuming that people repeat rituals because they want to re-establish revelation (which requires a very rich interpretation of people's very vague utterances on the topic) we could start from what people actually say: that there is a perceived danger in not performing the ritual or performing it in a different way; that they often cannot really explain what that danger is, or why non-performance would make it real; that most people who have gone through the ritual feel that way too.

Now intuitive perceptions of undefined danger, a concern with proper precautions, and an obsession with accurate performance of precautionary measures are all familiar to neuro-psychologists, in the apparently remote domain of obsessive-compulsive disorder (see for instance March & Mulle, 1998). Moreover, the conceptual repertoire of OCD pathology is strikingly similar to that of many rituals: cleansing, purity, the danger of contamination, the undefined nature of the danger, the invisible nature of pollution, the necessity of clearly marked boundaries, etc. (Dulaney & Fiske, 1994). Both rituals and obsessive pathologies seem to activate, albeit in a heightened and grotesque way, perfectly normal cognitive systems specialised in the detection of and protection against contaminants in the natural environment (Cosmides & Tooby, 1999; Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 1993). These systems lead people to represent an undetectable source of pollution, with which any contact, however slight, is equally dangerous. Mere mention of such sources of contaminants provokes both fear and disgust and leads people to take particular care in following precautionary measures. People the world over are specially attentive to contact with particular contaminants

(excrement, rotting tissue, wounds, corpses, spittle, blood, etc.); children are very good at acquiring strong emotional responses to such contact just by observing adult reactions (rather than from experience); children are also disposed to adopt their cultural elders' precautionary measures as unproblematic (even if the link between precaution and danger is left undefined).

To some extent, religious rituals are highly salient inasmuch as they activate these evolved tendencies of the human mind. This at least is a possible connection suggested by the urgency with which people feel that rituals should be faithfully repeated, by the inchoate or invisible nature of the danger against which rituals protect, and by the extraordinary similarity in themes between obsessive precautions, everyday fear of contamination, and religious rituals.

This is only one of the many possible factors that may explain repetition. I mention it here at some length to illustrate a more general fact: Against such simpler, more direct hypotheses (that salient, emotionally charged rituals happen to contain conceptual elements likely to persuade people that there might be some undefined danger in not performing the rituals again in a similar manner), the more complex alternative presented by Whitehouse (that the rituals convey revelations, that the revelation is connected to identity, that people want to preserve the latter, that this makes them reiterate the rituals) requires relevant evidence at each step of the hypothesised causal chain. This is not often perceived, because we anthropologists often take it for granted that rituals convey meaning, that meaning creates identity, that people want to preserve identity. We repeat that often but there is less than overwhelming evidence for any of these seemingly obvious propositions.

Another possible modification to Whitehouse's formulation would focus on the features of doctrinal transmission. Whitehouse claims that the extraordinary correlation between doctrinal practices and literacy is misleading. Although it would be difficult to find a literate polity without a doctrinal system or a doctrinal practice outside literate cultures, Whitehouse plays down the connection, notably as explained by Jack Goody (1986) for two reasons. The first one is that there are some exceptions, such as the Pomio Kivung cult or the Inca empire. But that is hardly convincing. In any empirical discipline, anyone who found a .9 correlation between two features would try to explain their association rather than base their conclusions on the .1 exceptions (and I am sure the correlation in this case is even greater than a 'mere' .9, given that some of these exceptions are clearly derivative; Pomio Kivung was construed on the basis of the missionaries' religion). The second reason is that literacy 'comprises an extremely heterogeneous set of practices' with different consequences (p. 174-5) on religion and social organisation. Whitehouse stops there, suggesting that the mere existence of some (unspecified) differences between literate cultures is enough to disqualify literacy as a causal factor. But one can always find differences between any two places. The question is whether they are relevant to the issue at hand. Whitehouse concludes that 'the principal characteristics [?] associated with literacy are *in fact* [my emphasis] features of the doctrinal mode of religiosity, whether or not a tradition operating in this mode happens to utilise a system of writing' (p. 175). Given that practically *all* doctrinal practitioners actually use some writing, the last clause is misleading, and we are left with what seems to me pure stipulation: the choice of a 'mode' that promotes semantic encoding via repeated, argumented lessons is the original cause, the prime mover, and the constitution of a clerisy, the constant use of literate sources, the insistence on literal renditions of these sources, the complex explicit arguments, all these are mere effects. But there is no good reason to decide that the mode of religiosity is a prime mover. Besides, this move obscures some important aspects of doctrinal practices.

So let me offer a modified version, in the same cognitive-evolutionary spirit of *Arguments and Icons* but with simpler causal connections. Among the many consequences of the emergence of complex agrarian polities is the appearance of castes or guilds of specialists in all sorts of technical skills: in craftsmanship of course but also in book-keeping, in writing, in ritual. In any such polity, there will be a competition between various providers of religious services, people who earn their keep, their status or their influence

in exchange for perceived religious competence. Some of these providers are similar to the shamans and other local specialists found in most human groups. Their claim to efficacy is based on local reputation, on apprenticeship with a famed specialist, on supposed connections to local supernatural agents, in general on their own individual characteristics. But other religious specialists join the equivalent of craftsmen's guilds. Their claim to a share of the religious market is based on features that contrast with those of shamans. A religious guild promises to deliver a stable, uniform kind of service that only it can provide, but also a service that any member of the guild will provide in the same way. Proper service depends not on the personal qualities of the specialists but on their being similar to any other member of the guild. Naturally, a group like that will claim connection, not to local spirits and ancestors but to larger-scale supernatural agents with whom the guild proposes to interact with in the same way, regardless of the particular place and customers.

Given that such guilds only appeared in complex polities and that these very often had some writing system, it is not surprising that the guilds also used writing. A great advantage of writing is that it facilitates the uniformity of service and practice that is the main selling point of such professional groups. So religious guilds that set great store by literate sources, written transmission and the kind of systematic argument made easier by writing, are more likely to subsist than groups that ignored the technology of writing. Conversely, given that uniformity and substitutability are important assets of the guild, any appeal to personal charismatic features or shamanistic revelation are actively discouraged.

All these features of religious guilds contribute to create what Whitehouse rightly describes as a very special mode of transmission: one in which there is a sharp distinction between the specialist's and the congregation's respective roles, where the specialists are all trained in the same way and convey similar messages, where these messages are made uniform by constant repetition and explicit argumentation, where semantic encoding of complex connections between propositions is possible via the cognitive route described in *Arguments and Icons*, and finally where, *pace* Whitehouse's talk of exceptions, the mode of transmission almost invariably involves the reading and commenting of written texts.

This may help solve what remains a mystery in Whitehouse's account. Although each mode sometimes borrows some superficial features from the other, it still remains, as Whitehouse rightly points out, that they mix no more than oil and water; they really are *divergent* modes of religiosity. The practices organised around salient sensory arousal do not usually blend with those that require organised argumentation and explication of a stable dogma. Why is that? Each follows a specific route to memory consolidation, making use of specific cognitive-emotional processes, with different consequences on people's memories. This would explain why you cannot use both at the same time in the transmission of the same concepts. But why could you not use them in different circumstances in a particular religious tradition?

Whitehouse's own explanation is that each mode conveys a revelation and that the latter is the basis of religious identity. All religious practices bind together members of the group; but doctrinal and imagistic practices do it differently (pp. 9-11). The latter tie each participant to particular persons who happened to take part in the same salient events; by contrast, doctrinal practices foster a sense of generalised membership; you are there primarily, and you associate with others principally, as a Christian or a Pomio-Kivung member, not as So-and-so of this or that particular family and village. But again, why cannot some traditions have it both ways, fostering a sense of personalised membership through salient events as well as a sense of larger community through doctrine? According to Whitehouse's own cognitive models, such combined traditions would be conceptually heterogeneous but probably very successful as well.

The main reason, I would argue, is a matter of marketing, that is, of politics. Doctrines are promoted by professional guilds and guilds depend on the stable and de-contextualised provision of similar services. Guilds are cartels. Groups of craftsmen the world over try to make prices and services uniform, and repress attempts to individualise the offer. In the same way, we know that members of religious guilds intuitively perceive that charismatic specialists dangerously threaten their group's overall grip on the market. The



conflict is a political one. This may explain four important features of the actual distribution of the modes:

[1] We do not find a mixture of the two modes in any particular 'tradition'. If found in the same place, they remain conceptually and socially distinct.

[2] However, in many places people actually receive religious services from both kinds of traditions, 'shamans' and 'priests' to be brief.

[3] The doctrinal mode generally originates in a complex polity (the local state or a distant empire) and is promoted by an organised guild of practitioners with identical training and practices.

[4] The potential conflict between following the guild and following more local specialists is invariably highlighted by the guild's attempt to repress, suppress or downgrade the local specialists, *not the other way around*. In other words, shamans are more dangerous to priests than priests to shamans.

I see no explanation of these various facts more parsimonious than in terms of economic and political competition between organised cartels of specialists on the one hand and individual operators on the other. This amounts to a small revision of Whitehouse's arguments. The point of proposition [3] is that the doctrinal mode does not come from nowhere, that it originates in a historically specific kind of social organisation and is made much more powerful by the technology of literacy. Proposition [2] is a challenge to Whitehouse's claim that doctrinal and imagistic practices yield incompatible revelations and bases for identity. People in general see no problem in using both kinds of tradition depending on the circumstances. It is the religious specialists, and in practice the doctrinal specialists, that see the two modes as opposite and try (mostly unsuccessfully) to convince people that they are incompatible.

So we can preserve the essential features of Whitehouse's rich psychological model without assuming that any religious practice ever delivers revelation. Perhaps some do, some of the time, for some people, but that is neither necessary nor sufficient for transmission. What is necessary for transmission is that people identify some ways of doing things as appropriate (in contrast with possible alternatives) and that they perceive some ill-defined danger or some potential cost in not reproducing these occurrences to the best of their memory capacities. Imagistic practices do that because the events themselves are salient enough to remain engraved as unique episodes, together with all their irrelevant features. Doctrinal practices do it by offering a logical construction that multiple repetition and argumentation render more and more plausible, and by offering a guaranteed, similar, often monopolistic service throughout a complex society. We can have all the psychology that Whitehouse uses to distinguish between the modes without much revelation taking place anywhere. Indeed, such vague, apparently unproblematic but ultimately meaningless terms as 'revelation' (in the same way as 'belief' and 'world-view') are prime candidates for scientific reduction in the kind of cognitively informed anthropology of religion that Whitehouse promotes, and to which this book is such an inspiring contribution.

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*Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Harvey Whitehouse, Oxford Univ. Press, 2000)

Reviewed by *Fredrik Barth* (Department of Anthropology, Boston University)  
[pages 14-17]

In *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity*, Harvey Whitehouse has provided us with a stimulating and valuable study. Working from his own, very apposite, ethnographic field materials from New Britain, and developing themes he has introduced previously in connection with them, he thinks broadly and compared incisively to provide us with a strong and ambitious argument. There is much here for all of us to develop, critique, and try out in further research and analysis.

Unlike much contemporary writing in anthropology, Whitehouse is exemplary in being explicit and seeking precision in his argument and presentation. He makes clear claims and tries to marshal specific evidence in their support, thereby allowing his readers to engage actively in every step of the analysis that he develops. The JRS format of simultaneous multiple reviews followed by the author's responses further facilitates this kind of engagement. And since Whitehouse develops an argument with which I have sympathy and affinity, and uses my own Baktaman work for parts of his exposition, I believe I can contribute best to this forum by addressing selectively those themes where he most resonates with my own work.

Whitehouse's main thesis is embodied in the very title of his book: it seeks to identify the divergent modes of religiosity that develop where respectively words, teachings and dogma, or rituals, images, and actions, provide the dominant modes of religious communication. Both modes, he points out, are probably found in every religion; but different religious traditions are very different in their emphases: where some focus heavily on sermon, doctrine, repetition, and semantic structure, others deal in collective ritual, physical images, episodes of heightened experience, and enactment. The religious mode of missionaries in Melanesia was strongly of the former type, whereas precolonial Melanesian religions were constructed in the latter mode. The current religious scene in Melanesia, as indeed among people anywhere, can be clarified by distinguishing these two distinctive modalities and recognizing their very different communicative, cognitive, and emotional dynamics.

Whitehouse mainly employs four ethnographic bodies of data from Papua New Guinea to develop his thesis: his field materials from the Pomio Kivung movement in New Britain, the literature on the Paliau movement in Manus, my materials on Baktaman initiations, and data from the literature on the Taro Cult in the Orokaiva area. Of these the former two are used to characterize the "doctrinal" mode, the latter two the "imagistic" mode. But his purpose is not merely to generalize and classify the overt formations of tradition and religion in these two types, but to develop a general theory linking the distinctive features of the modes of religiosity to universal features of human memory. The crux, as I understand it, is the psychologists' distinction between "semantic" and "episodic" (or "autobiographical" or "flashbulb") memory (Whitehouse 2000:5ff., 119ff.). In the former, memory operates by linking an experienced event to a schema for similar events. But where an event is experienced as unique and unprecedented, there can be no pre-established

schema for it; and so it is not merged into a structure of expectations, but vividly encoded in its particularity, typically linked with a sense of emotional arousal and salience. The doctrinal mode of religious representation aims at establishing strong and enduring schemas for interpreting and evaluating the world by teaching, repetition, and logical argument. The imagistic mode, on the other hand, relies on surprise, emotional arousal, and vividness to achieve the salience and durability of its message.

With this perspective, Whitehouse opens up a number of productive issues. I shall focus on the “imagistic” side of his model.

Among other major issues, Whitehouse provides an explanation for the role of ordeals, of fear and even terror, in many initiation-based Melanesian religions. Ordeals of fear and pain are certainly recurrent features of Baktaman initiations, and they are only weakly accounted for in my own analysis of them. I simply treat the imposition of fear and pain as aspects of stage management, a way to dramatize the claims to supreme significance and importance for the revelations, and an evocation of the force of potential sanctions supporting the explicit taboos of ritual and secrecy. Whitehouse, on the other hand, makes the mechanism of the memory function the essential key: it is the terror that provides the heightened emotion and secures that vivid and detailed “flashbulb” character of memories that make the experience – the imagery of the initiation – durable and salient for life.

This is an interesting and compelling argument; but some doubts and queries also do arise. First we may try some introspection on the properties of such autobiographical memories of our own, to savor their flashbulb quality of vivid, but perhaps indiscriminate, detail. I find that I have a few very early memories of this kind – but several of them seem inexplicable and unmotivated: singularly vivid, but devoid of any significance or emotion that I am able to identify. Others are indeed associated with fear and crisis – but yet seem rather detached from the crises and the emotions that must have accompanied them. But is not that a plausible concomitant of their flashbulb character? They are imprinted as visual moments, and so they do not and cannot encode the wider circumstances and sequences that motivated the fear and made them important. In other words: how well can memory thus encoded establish and convey the images and knowledge that are transmitted in the longer, sequential series of events in an initiation?

Secondly, let me submit a piece of field data that I felt gave me a sense of the subjective experience of Baktaman novices. I had been trying to establish the sequence of ritual acts that made up second degree initiation; and I asked a senior man without cult master responsibilities to tell it from his own initiation. When he would not do so, I presumed he was simply observing secrecy as one should towards outsiders, and I pleaded with him that after all, I had now been properly initiated into the sixth degree and should legitimately know such things. He immediately excused himself, saying that no, he was not being uncooperative, but “[y]ou know how it is during your initiation: your *finik* (spirit, consciousness) does not hear, you are afraid, you do not understand. Who can remember the acts and the words?” (Barth 1975:101). Thus I find it plausible that terrifying ordeals may so to speak, so petrify a novice that he is prevented from assimilating and remembering much of the actual content of his initiation experience – beyond, perhaps, a few vivid but cryptic flashbulb moments.

Is there some way we can salvage Whitehouse’s insight? Perhaps the fallback position he sometimes uses – that most religions as it turns out exhibit some features of both modes of transmission and memory – can be used to strengthen rather than weaken his thesis. Indeed, his chapters 6 and 7 – “Interacting modes of religiosity” and “Entangled histories” – show very convincingly how the two modes can interact and complement each other within single traditions.

What then with Baktaman initiations and the overwhelming primacy they seem to give to the imagistic mode? Let me suggest that Whitehouse’s insight can be used to give a more sophisticated analysis of the processes of transmission and reproduction in that tradition. I have noted in my ethnographic account, but not made any point of, the Baktaman rule that the next senior cohort/set, those who have preceded the

new set of novices, are supposed to have a special responsibility during the latter's initiation: that of "showing" their juniors the initiation (Barth 1975: 49f.). This has seemed to me unimportant, since the management of the initiation was invariably in the hands of the cult master as chief initiator. None the less, the next senior cohort was present during most of the episodes of the ritual, and sometimes assisted in minor ways in its staging. Whitehouse now makes me wonder if this is perhaps essential to the reproduction of the substantive body of the tradition: that it is in their role of "showing" their juniors, and not as terrified novices, that a cohort properly assimilates the substance, the corpus of knowledge and ritual acts, that composes an initiation. The two modes of memory may be functioning for complementary purposes within the tradition: salience and value are generated through the flashbulb mechanisms associated with the terror-induced heightened experience, while mastery of substance is only achieved second time round, and with further repetitions, when schematic memory becomes established. But *pace* Whitehouse, I would stress that such cognitive schemas are not necessarily semantic, but can be successfully remembered in non-verbal form after their repeated enactment as sequences of actions and images. Thus, Whitehouse's model of two kinds of memory can be used to provide a more adequate account of how different forms of experience may serve to convey and reproduce different aspects of religious tradition.

Whitehouse (2000: 92f.) used the felicitous term "gravity" to evoke the resultant quality of sacred, intense, salient, imagistic revelations among the Baktaman; but he prevaricates on the place of taboo and secrecy in the construction of this attitude. My account made the claim that secrecy endows the ritual with enhanced emotion and value, and turns it into a mystery cult; and that the absence of verbal exegesis serves to protect the integrity and power – indeed, the "gravity" – of the imagistic revelations. He, on the other hand, derives the gravity from the nature of episodic memory – but he sometimes also goes further, and questions the empirical validity of my data on secrecy and the absence of verbal exegesis (e.g. Whitehouse 2000: 92, employing materials from Crook 1997; n.d.). It is of course both legitimate and necessary for us to critique each other's ethnographic data as best we can. But Crook's very valuable ethnography comes from the Catholic community of Bolovip, 40km. as – the – crow – flies west of Baktaman and 30 years later; and I do not think it is suitable for correcting the record on religious subjectivity and practice among the Baktaman in 1968. At that time, only four years after first meeting with a Government patrol and with no contact ever with a missionary, the Baktaman community was remarkably pristine; apart from the important elimination of active warfare they practiced and knew only their own, endogenous form of life. I find it much more relevant and important that Whitehouse, in his exemplary use of sources on the imagistic Taro Cult, finds the same absence of verbal exegesis and explanation among the Orokaiva; likewise, that the rules of secrecy in pre-colonial religious traditions in Melanesia were widely codified as absolute taboos on speaking about the cults with the non-initiated. Whitehouse best echoes the qualities of gravity and wonder in Baktaman cult experience in the many passages where he leaves its tabooed, secret, and non-linguistic character in place.

Even under pristine conditions, there can be little doubt that Baktaman and other pre-colonial religions were in a perpetual state of flux. Does my attempt at recording and explaining some of this flux depend on the imputation of unconscious memory failure on the part of cult masters, as Whitehouse claims (ibid.:106ff.)? I think no, though I did identify change as "largely unacknowledged," as Whitehouse indeed correctly puts it when he quotes me. I was not concerned with mechanisms of memory, but with the constraints on change in the performance. Staging an initiation, or indeed any imagistic, non-verbal performance of any kind, will always call for a re-creation of it, as I have consistently emphasized. Even in Western music with an elaborate system of transcription and a complete musical score, we recognize that the performer must re-create the work in every performance. Without a transcript, this will be all the more true. So, I asked, what must that entail – and that led me to look for the criteria of validity by which an audience could judge an initiation.

Baktaman religious knowledge was composed of “what our ancestors showed us before they died.” There was no other valid source of revelations; and so the only sources of change that could be imagined (and were indeed feared) were distortion, diminution, and loss. In the pervasive ambience of secrecy and deception one comes to mistrust the transmission. Perhaps the ancestor lied. Perhaps they did not tell us all. Perhaps the present cult master is holding back, or getting it wrong.

When Whitehouse redraws this in terms of a dichotomy of conscious vs. unconscious change, that may unwittingly divert us more than enlighten us. It leads him to call for empirical evidence for the “unconscious” nature of innovation. But what would such evidence look like, unless one imagines a forcibly extracted admission from the cult master that he has faked it? I believe we have no alternative but to extrapolate backwards from whatever we can plausibly reconstruct of trajectories of substantive changes, and then model their patterns, since we cannot expect to obtain the actors’ account of an unacknowledged sequence of change and its causes.

Even in his analysis of the Taro Cult, where there is some time depth to the documentation, his analytical framing produces little to enlighten us on the dynamics of change. In the two “doctrinal” case studies, on the other hand, where there is considerable microhistorical data, he can pursue the analysis he favours, and plausibly identify the conscious but covert intentions and manipulations of actors, and thus how changes came about. But obviously, the particular dynamics of change in such traditions will be different from those of the “imagistic” ones, so his findings cannot be transposed to them.

Whitehouse also revisits the discussion on the extent of order in Melanesian religion, first raised by Brunton (1980), and goes a long way towards resolving it by distinguishing the forms of “order” entailed respectively in the doctrinal and the imagistic modalities of religion. He tries out his perspective on a sweeping account of the Reformation in 16th Century Europe; and he speculates on how to read the evidence from Upper Paleolithic cave art for modes of religiosity. With his active imagination and strong trust in the value of his new perspective, many may find these parts of his text too sprawling and intuitive. My view is that we should welcome both his imaginative drive, and his will to abstract and generalize. I hope he will have a lasting impact on both the form and the substance of anthropological analyses of religion and ritual.

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*Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Harvey Whitehouse, Oxford Univ. Press, 2000)

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[pages 18-22]

In this deceptively thin, clearly set out volume, H. Whitehouse develops two overlapping lines of inquiry. Drawing on four case studies, he traces out the historical relationship between two contrasting forms of religious practice in Melanesia, the one exemplified by indigenous initiation and fertility cults, the other occasioned by missionary Christianity. He then uses this contrast to propose a general distinction between two modes of religiosity founded upon radically different types of codification and transmission: the one, “imagistic”, is very ancient and makes use of emotion-laden images in the course of exceptional performances, the other, “doctrinal”, a more recent innovation, relies on routinized behavior and implicational logic expressed in language. Throughout, Whitehouse’s major concern is to demonstrate a series of organic links between the communicative procedures privileged by these two modes, the cognitive operations these procedures bring into play (episodic vs. semantic memory, differing conceptualizations of community), a number of formal features (such as frequency and scale) of the ritual practices corresponding to them and the divergent political trajectories these practices imply (size of participating communities, intensity of solidarity, degree of centralization and of hierarchy). His aim is thus to provide an overarching framework whereby different types of religious behavior may be accounted for in terms of mutually reinforcing relationships between underlying mental processes, manifest communicative styles and social structural concerns. In exploring various aspects of the imagistic/doctrinal dichotomy with reference to Melanesian ethnography and beyond, Whitehouse also sheds new light on a number of important anthropological issues such as the role of writing in religious life (J. Goody), the development of *communitas* (V. Turner) and the foundations of warfare and group formation during the Upper Paleolithic.

Let me say at the onset that I find the imagistic/doctrinal distinction a useful one and the various linkages described both convincing and extremely thought-provoking, especially with regard to the doctrinal mode. My principal reservations have to do with the way in which this contrast is built up by systematically giving analytical precedence to the internal, psychological states of the participating individuals. Thus, the logic of Whitehouse’s account proceeds from an interrogation regarding the actors’ mental operations (episodic vs. semantic memory, analogic vs. digital processing, etc) to the ritual practices in which these operations are activated (iconic vs. language-based communication, exceptional, face-to-face enactments vs. routinized, anonymous ones), to the wider social and political conditions these practices suggest. It seems to me that as a result of this emphasis on interior, intra-psychic mechanisms, certain essential features of imagistic practices are left largely unexamined.

Whitehouse devotes considerable space to the mechanics of the doctrinal mode and to the ways in which doctrinal and imagistic practices may interact. But what of the workings of the imagistic mode itself? This, as Whitehouse remarks, is “the real challenge”: “Of the two modes of religiosity, the imagistic is probably the least well understood in academic scholarship” (p. 186). In discussing Melanesian initiation/fertility rites, Whitehouse argues that this type of religious transmission is focused on collective ritual performances that provide the participants with surprising, emotion-arousing experiences (the “building blocks of episodic memory”) resulting in highly condensed, multivocal images: “a body of revelatory knowledge that is consciously turned over in the minds of initiates for years to come” (p. 30). In this respect, his account of the transmissive processes at work in imagistic

traditions is similar to V. Turner's (1967) well-known ideas about the role of initiatory sacra and ritual symbolism generally: as providing at once emotionally arousing and cognitively disorienting sensory experiences whereby novices are led to be aware of and to reflect upon certain axiomatic cultural values. The parallel drawn between traumatic episodes of initiation rites and "flashbulb memory" events is evocative but also misleading in that it implies a total disregard of the highly specific interactive conditions whereby such ritual episodes are in fact locally recognized and defined (Who is inflicting pain on whom? Who is revealing secrets to whom? Who is made aware of such goings-on and how?, etc). Whitehouse touches upon such issues very briefly, referring to Crook (n.d.) on the relational implications of secrecy, but does not pursue them, largely, I suspect, because this would detract from (or at least considerably complicate) the cognitively-driven framework he is trying to develop.

According to Whitehouse, the efficacy of imagistic religiosity is in large part founded upon the idea of analogic coding: the iconic properties of shocking, violent, emotion-evoking episodes are presumed to provide the novices with "a new awareness of the structure of the cosmos and their place within it" (p. 20). But what exactly does this new awareness consist of? In the cases he describes, as in initiations elsewhere, there is little evidence that novices absorb a great deal of new information about the world they live in. Indeed, the terrifying ordeals and surprising revelations they are forced to undergo seem more oriented towards a putting into question of previously held ideas than the communication of new ones. Moreover, most if not all of the "revelatory knowledge" novices may be said to gain – in the form of ambiguous impressions, multivocal images, etc. – has a distinctly auto-referential character in that it refers above all to the initiation process itself. On the other hand, what the novices definitely *do* acquire is a new point of view: a heightened appreciation of the mysterious, polysemic dimension of everyday objects and events, whose true nature, while remaining partially hidden, is held to be accessible only by means of the initiatory experience itself. In other words, what is acquired in initiation is not a new message (a body of knowledge), but a new context. Now, this new context, I would argue, is acquired by the novices not because their initiation changes their knowledge of the world, but because, by virtue of their initiation, the position from which they view the world is not the same: in the course of their initiation, the entire complex of relationships linking them with adult men, with women, with children, with foreigners and with each other – indeed, the very premises of these interdependent relationships – is irreversibly transformed. It is, I suggest, this coordinated transformation of relationships that is analogically encoded, that is, in plainer words, acted out during the ritual performance of initiation (cf. Houseman 1993). I am pleading here for a return to G. Bateson's (1972) conception of an analogic code as a mode of communication that concerns not "facts" or even images as such but relationships; thus, he opposes for example the digital coding of language to the analogic coding of non-verbal attitudes and behavior. In this light, the "symbolic meanings" that participants and/or observers are able to "read into" ritual behavior remain subordinate to the relational realities it instantiates: it is the internal organization of ritual action itself, and not the icons or experiences it affords, that is the real object of transmission.

One of the implications of the alternative perspective outlined here is that ritualization of the imagistic type is to be envisaged as a particular mode of action, structured by principles other than those of ordinary intentionality and instrumentality. Unlike many everyday activities, it is not transmitted only or even mainly through the acquisition of abstract schemas of the first-we-do-this-then-we-do-that variety. There is some sort of participatory, that is, emotionally engaging, relational patterning process at work in ritual performances that enables them to provide participants with experiences in which their relations with others are conventionally recontextualized and thereby transformed. This interactive dynamic, which may be shown to underlie both the distinctive unity of such performances and the

ordered integration of improvisation and of new elements to them, is what C. Severi and I have elsewhere (1998) called the “relational form” of ritual action.

What I am trying to emphasize here is a basic difference between doctrinal and imagistic traditions that is largely overlooked in Whitehouse’s account: whereas the doctrinal mode is above all concerned with the transmission of particular ideas, the imagistic mode is oriented towards the transmission of particular actions. The explicit goal of doctrinal mode, Whitehouse tells us, is “to create a single unified system of ideas within each individual mind” (p. 101). Religious practice, that is, what people actually do together, occupies a clearly subordinate role: practice is made sense of with reference to this system of ideas, the nature of the actions performed being less important than the fact that they are routinized. It seems to me that the reverse holds true for the imagistic mode: whereas the ideas and images participants may have are inevitably both approximate and variable, what is of primary importance is the reproduction of the publicly enacted performances in reference to which they may be held to acquire new meaning.

Consider the case of initiation rites, ceremonial events that Whitehouse takes as the model for imagistic religion. Contrary to what his account may appear to suggest, initiation is not a once in a lifetime experience. Indeed, the most frequent experience men have of initiation is not as novices, but as members of the initiating community in the course of other initiations subsequent to their own. While one’s experience as a novice probably does result in a number of haunting memories, it is surely as persons who direct the novices’ (and the uninitiated women’s) behavior, who prepare and inflict hardships upon them, who comfort them afterwards, who reveal secrets to them and so forth, that participants acquire (under the direction of ritual leaders) that which may truly be said to be transmitted through such rituals, namely, the organization of the ritual action itself. Once again, I am not saying that a novice’s initial experience is unimportant, but only that it remains impressionistic, largely idiosyncratic and in any case is grossly insufficient to enable him to grasp how the rite is to be undertaken. It may well be that this opposition between initial and subsequent initiation experiences is attenuated in the case of elaborate age-grade systems such as is found among the Baktaman. However, I would submit that even in such cases, the cognitive and emotional shock accruing from the revelations that accompany a man’s ascension to higher grades is conditioned at least as much if not more by his having acted as an initiator of others into lower grades than by his own initiation into these grades as a novice.

To sum up, I would argue, against Whitehouse, for imagistic practices generally, and for initiation rituals in particular, (1) that transmissive processes come into play less for first-time participants than they do for regular participants, (2) that these processes concern less the multivocal images ritual experiences may provide than the collective performances in which these images may arise, and finally, (3) that what may be said to be analogically “coded” in these performances is not a body of knowledge but the relational changes these performances purport to effect. (It is worth noting that from this point of view, “regular participants” includes those, such as women in the case of male initiation rites, who are held to act as the nominally excluded party: they also are actively involved in the transmission of the imagistic tradition concerned.)

Envisaging imagistic ritual practice in its own terms, that is, as a particular mode of action, would allow, I suggest, for a somewhat more balanced account of the divergences between the doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity. On the one side we have the transmission of a system of logically interlocking ideas in the minds of each individual, upheld by routinized behavior entailing the production of language-based propositions (digital coding). On the other we have the transmission of a system of collectively performed actions, upheld by exceptional interactive schemes entailing the production of moving, multivocal indexes of relational change (analogic coding in Bateson’s sense). However, because



Whitehouse's framework, as it stands, leaves little room for such an approach, he is led to a series of reductions that, to my mind at least, limit the range of his argument.

This comes out particularly in the concluding paragraphs that precede the epilogue (pp. 183-185). The advent of the doctrinal mode of religiosity is held to be a fairly recent invention, bringing about "new ways of cognizing ritual". At the same time, however, because repetition is commonly found both in a wide variety of ritual and other activities, this cognitive turning-point can not be due to routinization itself. Rather, the "crucial difference" whereby the doctrinal mode comes into its own, is the use of routinization in "identity-conferring" or "revelatory" rituals, that is, rituals which are "constitutive of group identity", which "provide the basis upon which common humanity [is] construed".

While bearing witness to the analytical rigor of Whitehouse's demonstration, this argument has a number of unfortunate consequences. First of all, what would appear to be clear cases of imagistic practice, – spell-casting, divination, sacrifice, healing rites, witchcraft, and so forth –, are paradoxically subsumed under the residual category of "quite repetitive non-revelatory rituals" and, as such, are likened, along with "technical procedures used in the daily round of subsistence activities", to doctrinal-type activity: "[s]chemas for these sorts of actions are activated in much the same way as I have described for the routinized rituals of the doctrinal mode of religiosity" (p. 184). The possibility that such "non-revelatory" ritual performances might be structured in ways (indeed, in specifically imagistic ways) that distinguish them from everyday technical procedures, is thus eliminated. The implication is that imagistic functioning applies mainly if not exclusively to icon-based, "revelatory" or "identity-conferring" rites, that is, to initiation-like rituals. This in itself is not without problems: many africanists, for example, would not hesitate to qualify divination rituals as "revelatory" or to characterize sacrifices as "identity conferring" in exactly Whitehouse's sense. In any event, the end result is that the relevance of the imagistic/doctrinal dichotomy becomes severely restricted: repetitious, doctrine-based religious practices (those associated with Christianity for example, but also, one suspects, certain nominally "secular" activities such as schooling or bureaucratic processing) are shown to be directly comparable to initiation/fertility rites as alternative types of "revelatory", "identity-conferring" institutions.

One final remark regarding the anonymous communities implied by the doctrinal mode. It may well be, as Whitehouse argues, that notions of abstract collective identity derive from or are at least favored by doctrinal traditions (although the wide-spread presence of non-localized clans, moieties and such social formations argues against this idea). However, there is no denying that imagistic traditions abound in non-specific conceptualizations of Others, that is, social actors or "persons" not like ourselves: foreigners, but also spirits, ancestors, witches, totemic beings and so forth. In developing Whitehouse's dichotomy, one is tempted to suggest that whereas identity-conferring traditions of the imagistic type tend to associate the affirmation of specific identities in face-to-face practices with abstract conceptions of otherness, the doctrinal mode tends to combine anonymous conceptions of collective selfhood with proselytizing practices – an intrinsic aspect of doctrinal religiosity?, *cf.* for example Festinger 1990 – entailing face-to-face confrontations with specific others. In the imagistic mode, we tend to delineate our individual selves against the backdrop of our relationships with abstract others (spirits, ancestors, etc), whereas in the doctrinal mode, we tend to see others as particularized versions of our anonymous, collective selves.

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*Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Harvey Whitehouse, Oxford Univ. Press, 2000)

Reviewed by *Robert N. McCauley* (Department of Philosophy, Emory University)  
[pages 23-29]

### **Theoretical Arguments are Not Icons**

*Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* argues for a theory of religious arrangements that Harvey Whitehouse has been developing for a decade. As he acknowledges in the book's opening pages, he stands on the shoulders of giants. Although important theorists before him have advanced similar bivalent schemes for organizing religious phenomena, none have proposed a theory as ambitious as the one Whitehouse has formulated or one as deeply rooted in the dynamics of human cognition.

The latter achievement places *Arguments and Icons* among a pioneering body of work on the cognitive foundations of religion that has arisen over the past fifteen years and provided penetrating accounts of a wide variety of religious experience and practice. Unlike many contemporary cultural anthropologists, these cognitive theorists have not surrendered the traditional goal of cultural anthropology, viz., to devise *scientific* accounts of cultural phenomena. They seek systematic theories about rudimentary causal mechanisms at the psychological level and about their consequences for culture. Ideally, these theories not only provide new explanatory insights about cultural forms but general principles capable of supporting both predictions and counterfactual conditionals. These cognitive theorists prize such traditional theoretical virtues as generality, clarity, precision, independent testability, and explanatory scope and power. Their theories are not icons requiring reverence but speculative conjectures requiring argument.

Whitehouse's project fits squarely within this framework. Although he emphasizes that the two modes of religiosity do not describe thoroughly deterministic causal patterns (p. 2), they are, nevertheless, "empirically significant trajectories" (p. 1) that correlate values for a baker's dozen of related features that he specified systematically in his earlier book, *Inside the Cult* (1995, p. 197). The theory is ambitious—addressing structural, conceptual, social, political, demographic, and historical variables as well as psychological ones.

The doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity constitute alternative constellations of opposing values for each of these thirteen variables. The imagistic mode employs vivid, emotionally stimulating images (in a variety of sensory modalities) to spark episodic memories about relatively infrequent moments of especial religious import that foster intense group solidarity. Imagistic religious systems are typically local in scope and ideology. They are socially flexible and loosely structured conceptually. Leadership in the imagistic mode is usually informal, indirect, and comparatively passive (/aggressive). By contrast, the doctrinal mode is characterized by explicit, logically complex doctrines that frequently performed, highly routinized practices lodge in semantic memory. Doctrinal systems focus on intellectual persuasion, i.e., arguments that, putatively, any human can grasp. Consequently, the doctrines are universal in scope, and doctrinal systems proselytize to insure their large scale dissemination. The goal is an imagined community that potentially encompasses all of humanity. Although these doctrines stimulate extensive exegetical activity, doctrinal systems emphasize uniformity of belief and rigidity of practice. Enduring, dynamic, centralized leadership typically dictates such arrangements.

Consistent with the position Whitehouse adopted early on (see, for example, Whitehouse, 1992), his "Introduction" to *Arguments and Icons* makes it clear from the outset that it is the *divergence in the cognitive processing*--specifically, in the consolidation of memories--associated with each mode that organizes the two corresponding constellations of values. Insuring the memorability of religious materials is the causal engine at the center of his theory of religious modes that conditions all but one of the other variables. The imagistic and doctrinal modes have the shapes they do because they differentially exploit episodic and semantic memory respectively. Memory dynamics enjoy this pride of place, because explaining the *transmission* of religious systems is the salient point of contact between the interests of cultural anthropology and the new cognitive approach to religion. (Sperber, 1996) A moment's reflection on the transmission of religious systems in nonliterate cultures will readily reveal the critical role that human memory plays in their evolution. Humans will not transmit cultural materials, if they cannot remember them, and without the aid of texts, remembering even simple cultural materials is no trivial matter! This is one of the decisive respects in which the character of human cognition constrains cultural forms. Of course, "remembering" cultural materials here need not imply completely faithful recall, but it does presume sufficient coincidence of representations to insure a widespread sense of continuity over time in a religious community.

Whitehouse's principal aim in *Arguments and Icons* is to provide evidence for the explanatory scope of his theory. Until its publication, the overwhelming majority of the theory's applications and illustrations that he had supplied arose

- (1) from his work in the Eastern Province of New Britain Island on the Kivung religion and on the splinter group he witnessed during his fieldwork in the villages of Dadul and Maranagi and
- (2) from Fredrik Barth's study (1975) of ritual among the Baktaman.

The ritual practices of the Baktaman and of the Dadul-Maranagi splinter group exemplified the imagistic mode of religiosity. The mainstream Kivung movement (from which the Dadul-Maranagi group splintered) seems the quintessential illustration of religiosity in the doctrinal mode. The latter is a particularly important contention, since virtually all of the Kivung participants were *illiterate*. Throughout his work Whitehouse provides ample evidence both of the extent and the complexity of Kivung doctrines and of participants' thorough-going mastery of their myriad details. Contrary to the spirit, if not the letter, of much theorizing in cultural anthropology over the last century (e.g., Goody, 1977), a group need not be literate nor possess texts to exemplify religion in the doctrinal mode (p. 175). However, the religious movements Whitehouse discusses in *Arguments and Icons* do raise the question

whether such doctrinal practices will arise *spontaneously* in a culture that has absolutely no experience of such literary accomplishments.

Whitehouse devotes much space to showing that the forms of religiosity his fieldwork revealed among the Baining people of Dadul and Maranagi have recurred across Melanesia since World War II. Whitehouse delineates a dynamic pattern containing four distinguishable sorts of religious arrangements. The first and fourth are basically imagistic, whereas the second and third are doctrinal.

The first was the religiosity of the traditional Melanesian systems that reigned prior to these peoples' contacts with great industrial powers. (See Chapter 1.) Before the nineteenth century and in many cases as late as the outbreak of World War II, when these groups' external contacts were limited almost exclusively to the peoples occupying immediately contiguous regions, the traditional religions of these Melanesian peoples typically involved some mix of fertility cults and the veneration of ancestors. These traditional religions, like the earliest manifestations of religiosity among our species (Chapter 8), were thoroughly imagistic. Like the religious system of the Baktaman, who remained basically untouched even by World War II, these traditional Melanesian religions featured periodic initiatory rituals for males loaded with image-eliciting sensory pageantry. These rituals gradually introduced them to loosely organized esoteric knowledge sustained by what Barth (1975) has called analogic coding. Its transmission among each new rising cohort of males depended upon the ability of these demanding, often shocking, rituals to forge episodic memories that encoded something of the practices involved, of the knowledge communicated, and of the fundamental cultural importance of both.

The intrusions of colonial regimes, their armies, their corporations and, especially, their missionaries forced many of these traditional imagistic religions to compete with a religious system of a very different sort. The doctrinal system of the Christian missionaries is the second readily distinguishable religious system in this pattern. Armed not merely with religious doctrines elaborated in *texts*, the Christian missionaries as well as the soldiers, bureaucrats, and business people came loaded with all sorts of knowledge, wealth, and power. They used these formidable resources to reorder Melanesian worlds. So, for example, the village of Dadul was itself an invention of the missionaries to encourage easily administered permanent settlements rather than having to manage with the temporary habitations of these slash and burn agriculturalists. The Christian missionaries also discouraged traditional religious beliefs, practices, and symbols. In one Melanesian society after another traditional initiations largely disappeared within a single generation as people were baptized and began attending regular services where the focus was on highly regularized, repeated rituals with little splash and the mastery of new myths and extensive doctrines codified in texts.

The third component in this pattern is the subsequent emergence of new doctrinal systems among the Melanesians themselves. The Kivung seems a perfect illustration, but so too, Whitehouse maintains in *Arguments and Icons*, is the Paliau Movement (p. 56). On many fronts these religious movements seem poorly disguised imitations of the religious arrangements of missionary Christianity. They too primarily employ repetitive, mundane rituals to imprint in semantic memory elaborate doctrines that point to a moral transformation that will bring about a new age. That new age will not only correct a moral imbalance, it will also reallocate knowledge, wealth, and power, which--up to now--non-indigenous peoples have dominated. Like missionary Christianity, these indigenous doctrinal systems involve a hierarchy of religious leaders whose jobs include monitoring orthodoxy among the followers. Whitehouse proposes that most cargo cults, then, have arisen not just from Melanesians' observations of the material wealth and technical command of non-indigenous peoples but also from their imitations of those peoples' doctrinal religious systems.

The fourth and final part in this pattern is the inevitable eruption of imagistic splinter groups from these doctrinal cargo cults. Reliably, these splinter groups aim to hurry up the dawning of the new

age that the mainstream cargoist movements anticipate. The splinter groups' ritual innovations reintroduce practices characteristic of the imagistic mode and often resurrect the forbidden, nearly forgotten forms and symbols of the local traditional religion. As previously noted, Whitehouse witnessed such a splintering first hand in Dadul and Maranagi and demonstrated in his first book that such upheavals were neither unique to these two villages nor to other Kivung communities. Now in *Arguments and Icons* Whitehouse suggests that such splintering arises periodically in virtually all Melanesian cargo cults. He highlights the Noise and Ghost Cults of the Paliau Movement as further illustrations.

Highlighting this final step in this dynamic pattern, situating all four of these steps within his analytical scheme, stressing this pattern's recurrence across Melanesia over the past half century, and supplying an account of its cognitive underpinnings jointly suffice to ensconce *Arguments and Icons* among the landmark studies of Melanesian religion and among the new cognitive literature in the study of religion. Whitehouse's hopes for his theory of religious modes, however, far exceed accounting merely for Melanesian materials from the second half of the twentieth century. As the quick exposition of the doctrinal status of missionary Christianity hinted, Whitehouse thinks that his theory applies as readily to Christianity as it does to the religious beliefs, practices, and experiences of the Melanesians. Chapter 7 argues for the thoroughly doctrinal character of Reformed Christianity in Northern Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and for its thematic (if not historical) continuity with missionary Christianity of both the Protestant and Catholic varieties. Finally, though, it is Whitehouse's discussion in Chapter 8 of the imagistic character of prehistoric religion that clarifies just how sweeping his theoretical aspirations are. He, like all of the contemporary cognitive theorists, is aiming to provide a universally applicable theory, since the conceptual, social, political, and historical patterns their theories countenance are all, ultimately, rooted in the nature of a cognitive system that all human beings share.

Chapter 5 isolates the principal cognitive mechanism driving Whitehouse's overall theory, viz., human memory. The two constellations of values that mark the doctrinal and imagistic modes on eleven of the variables Whitehouse presented earlier result from whether religious activities engage semantic or episodic memory, respectively. Indeed, engaging semantic as opposed to episodic memory constitutes the alternative values for the pivotal twelfth variable, which Whitehouse labels "cognitive processing" in his earlier book. Whether circumstances prompt one of these forms of memory or the other turns on the final (thirteenth) variable, viz., frequency of transmission. Whitehouse is explicit about the direction of the causality here: "If . . . analogic communication is an adaptation to the excessive demands placed on memory in an oral tradition which is very infrequently reproduced, then I suggest that the converse is also true: that the systematic, logically integrated character of Paliau's and Koriam's [i.e., Kivung] institutions is an adaptation to conditions of frequent reproduction" (pp. 105-106). In short, frequent transmission establishes semantic memories that occasion religious arrangements in the doctrinal mode, whereas infrequent transmission necessitates episodic memories that occasion religious arrangements in the imagistic mode.

Frequency of transmission, then, is his theory's underlying independent variable. At the core of Whitehouse's theory of religious modes is what Tom Lawson and I (in press) refer to as the "ritual frequency hypothesis." Briefly, this hypothesis holds that the performance frequency of religious rituals varies inversely with the levels of sensory pageantry those rituals embody (for the purposes of arousing participants' emotions). Rituals in the doctrinal mode are frequently performed but bland activities that generally do not arouse participants very much emotionally. They do not need to. Memory for these rituals arises on the basis of their frequent repetition. By contrast, rituals in the imagistic mode occur far less frequently but typically carry a big emotional punch resulting from sensory stimulation that ranges from the feasting that regularly accompanied the innovative rituals of the Dadul-Mararagi splinter group

to the outright torture in third degree Baktaman initiation. As adaptations to dissimilar performance frequencies these contrasting ritual arrangements produce memories of very different sorts, and particularly in non-literate settings (whether prehistoric or contemporary) such memories are vital for the transmission of the religious systems in question.

The ritual frequency hypothesis certainly gets the arrangements surrounding most rituals right. Usually, the infrequently performed rituals do contain higher levels of sensory pageantry than the highly routinized rites that are regularly performed. *Usually, but not always* . . . Lawson and I (in press) argue that although Whitehouse's ritual frequency hypothesis covers most of the variance, it makes *incorrect* predictions about the ritual arrangements characteristic of two classes of rituals. We argue at length that the *ritual form hypothesis* that our own (Lawson and McCauley, 1990) theory of religious ritual competence spawns accounts for all of the cases the ritual frequency hypothesis gets right as well as for the ritual arrangements surrounding the two classes of rituals the ritual frequency hypothesis fails to explain.

At least a half dozen points of clarification arise, though, before it is possible to thoroughly assess the empirical adequacy of Whitehouse's theory. In the space that remains I will take up two of those points. So far, Whitehouse's work has basically involved collecting ethnographic and historical data that he argues his theory can account for. However, *the assessment of scientific theories turns not on what they allow but rather on what they disallow*. Addressing these two points as well as the others we take up in Chapter 4 of McCauley and Lawson (in press) is *imperative* for advancing Whitehouse's project; the theory's testability hangs in the balance.

First, since, indirectly, by way of its demands on human memory, frequency of transmission motivates all of the other variables Whitehouse's theory of religious modes encompasses, he needs to clarify both what counts as an occasion of transmission and for whom. More specifically, in the central case of ritual, he needs to specify what counts as a performance and on whom it exerts its mnemonic effects. *Prima facie* the answers to these questions might seem straightforward. Ascertaining a particular ritual's performance frequency would seem to involve nothing more than simply counting the number of times it is performed. But, this simple response obscures a host of theoretically relevant complications.

Consider both space and time. What are the geographical limits, if any, on these counts? Using an example familiar to most readers, in deciding on the performance frequency of Christian baptism do we count all of the baptisms I have had or that I have witnessed or that have been performed in my church or in all of the churches of the same denomination in my area or in all of the Christian churches in my area, regardless of their denomination, etc.? Likewise, what are the temporal limits, if any, on these counts? Depending upon the religious system in question, there may be special times when a particular ritual is performed daily for a month but at no other time during the year. Measured over that month, its frequency is higher than that of a ritual that is performed once a week throughout the year. Measured over the year, its frequency is lower. Which measure is the relevant one for deciding their comparative performance frequencies in order to test the theory's predictions about the accompanying ritual arrangements?

One answer to these questions would be to simply do raw counts of all ritual performances in my church throughout that church's lifetime. But an obvious problem arises. In many large Protestant churches in Northern Europe and North America, it is quite possible that more weddings have been performed than performances of Communion. On this answer to the questions in the previous paragraph, the wedding ritual would have a higher performance frequency than would Communion, and the theory would, therefore, predict that it would have lower levels of sensory pageantry. But that prediction is clearly false. And this simple answer is just as clearly unsatisfactory, since it yields an interpretation of

the theory on which it supplies false predictions about some of the most familiar and straightforward cases it should address.<sup>1</sup>

If raw counts will not work and the counts are to be selective, then what is the criterion for deciding which performances should figure in these counts and which should not? In the example at hand, the roles I played in the weddings and the Communion are different. I *observed* most of the weddings, whereas I directly *participated* in the Communion. In most religions I can observe many rituals countless times in which I have directly participated only once. (This is typically true of baptism for most Christians.) Yet in many versions of Christianity baptism is the most emotionally stimulating ritual performed. (Think 'full immersion baptism' here.) For this reason as well as for reasons having to do with experimental findings about the place of observation as opposed to participation in autobiographical memory (see McCauley, 1999 and Chapter 2 of McCauley and Lawson (in press)), the opportunity to *participate* in rituals (as opposed to merely observing them) seems the more likely criterion for deciding on rituals' frequencies of transmission. But *that conclusion* poses a further problem for the ritual frequency hypothesis and Whitehouse's theory of modes, for participation in rituals can take lots of forms, and some participants, especially ritual officiants, participate in rituals far more often than others. So, to avoid the paradox of having multiple performance frequencies for the same ritual, Whitehouse should supply criteria for differentiating the types of participation that are relevant for calculating rituals' transmission frequencies. In order to do so, what Whitehouse's theory needs is an account of *ritual form* of just the sort my and Lawson's theory provides.

Although theories never explain their independent variables, it seems a bit odd that Whitehouse does not even speculate on what variables constrain transmission frequencies. Since he does not and, more specifically, since he provides no cognitive account of them, it seems his theory of religious modes is fairly described as a cognitive theory one-step-removed. Lawson and I (in press) argue that an underlying *cognitive* variable, viz., participants' *representations* of their religious rituals' *forms*, is probably the single most important variable constraining rituals' transmission frequencies. Again, it seems, an account of *ritual form* and of its cognitive representation is the notable missing ingredient in Whitehouse's approach--both for providing it with thorough-going cognitive foundations and, as I have argued in the preceding paragraphs, for clarifying the theory in order to assure its testability.

That concern about the theory's testability leads to the second point of clarification I wish to raise. Various cautionary comments Whitehouse makes in *Arguments and Icons* engender the fear that, finally, his theory may disallow a good deal less than it seems. Whitehouse stresses that the two modes of religiosity are ideal types that do not always occur in their pristine forms. In the book's first paragraph, he states that "[t]hese fundamentally contrasting dynamics are often to be found within a single religious tradition" (p. 1). Near the end of Chapter 2, he claims that "[w]ithin many religions, both constellations of features interpenetrate in complex ways" (p. 52). Moreover, he finds the four stage dynamic pattern in Melanesia--summarized above--that traces the *interactions* between doctrinal and imagistic religious systems all the more extraordinary, since in many World Religions "[t]hese modalities may at times be so enmeshed that the analytical distinction seems to break down" (p. 149). Whitehouse seems to be conceding that what I shall call "mixed mode" phenomena seem a good deal more prevalent than his Melanesian case studies might suggest. In the light of such concessions, another way to put the current question is just how divergent are these two modes of religiosity?

Religious phenomena may mix modes in at least three ways. Whitehouse's theory seems eminently capable of handling the first, at least not inconsistent with the second, but a good deal more at sea concerning the third.

In the first case, class, wealth, education, or other social variables may stratify religious systems. Whitehouse's two modes of religiosity often seem just the ticket for helpfully demarcating the varied practices of the resulting sub-communities.

The second mixed mode phenomenon concerns the modes' *stability* over time. In the Melanesian cases (pp. 142-144)--sometimes in the span of a single generation--community members have openly participated in each of the four sorts of religious systems Whitehouse delineates. Minimally, this involves swings from imagistic arrangements (of traditional religion) to doctrinal arrangements (of both missionary Christianity and the mainstream cargo cults) and back to imagistic forms again (of the ecstatic splinter groups).

Of course, nothing about Whitehouse's theory rules these circumstances out, but its resources for making sense of them are profoundly limited. If some religious systems alternate between rituals that are representative of the doctrinal and imagistic modes, then, given Whitehouse's account of the two modes' cognitive bases (in terms of the demands on memory that varying performance frequencies occasion), neither his overall theory nor the ritual frequency hypothesis can do much more than simply *note* the corresponding differences in the performance frequencies of the two sorts of rituals. Neither provide any account for why a religious community's rituals might alternate like this. Both the theory of religious modes and the frequency hypothesis immediately confront the same limitation I discussed above, viz., that they provide no explanation for performance frequencies.

The third kind of mixed mode phenomenon pertains to the modes' *uniformity*. After his remark about the two modes enmeshed, Whitehouse himself asks "[w]hat are we to make . . . of ecstatic practices in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism that have become highly routinized or, in Sufism in Islam, ecstasy that leads to highly literary forms of religious expression?" (p. 149). Given how Whitehouse characterizes the two modes of religiosity *and their cognitive foundations*, it is *not* obvious how the values for some of the thirteen variables indicative of one of the modes could mix with the values for the other variables indicative of the other. Activities like meditation and yoga not only create special states of mind, they have, for example, in the case of the Muslim Sufis, also engendered literary and theological projects. Such activities mix Whitehouse's modes in that their *routinization* as well as the generation of reflective, literary activity look like features that are emblematic of the doctrinal mode, whereas the creation of these *special states of mind* seems to realize a revelatory potential indicative of the imagistic.

I end by emphasizing that it is Whitehouse himself who raises these troublesome cases. What better evidence that he readily recognizes that we ought never to treat theoretical arguments as if they are religious icons?

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### Endnotes

1. We provide many more counterexamples in Chapters 4 and 5 of McCauley and Lawson (in press).

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*Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Harvey Whitehouse, Oxford Univ. Press, 2000)

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[pages 30-33]

### Rituals, Modes, Memory and Historiography: The Cognitive Promise of Harvey Whitehouse

Whenever a man actively remembers that he has seen, heard or learned something, he always has the additional consciousness that he did so *before*.

—Aristotle

Rituals, one analyst has emphasized, are among the more public aspects of a religion and, hence, one of the features most remembered by practitioners of that religion as well as one of those most noted about it by others (Grimes 2000: 262). When, on the other hand, rituals are private or shielded from public view, they are, by turn, among the more intriguing and attractive features of that religion for insiders and among the most fascinating and speculated upon by outsiders (1). While numerous attempts have been made to describe the relationships between rituals and the religions or cultures with which they are integral, yielding both generalizations and particularizations, little attention has been paid to theoretical explanations for the mechanisms whereby such relations are presumed efficacious (Lawson-McCauley 1990: 171-177; Bell 1998: 208-211; Boyer 2001: 257). In his venturesome new book, *Arguments and Icons* (2000), Harvey Whitehouse has proposed that cognitive processing offers such an explanation--specifically, that alternative modes of ritual performance activate differing systems of memory which, in turn, have implications for sociopolitical association and, thereby, for the collective memories or histories of these political entities. As such, Whitehouse's theory of "divergent modes of religiosity" is the most explicit set of hypotheses yet proposed for explaining the connection between cognition and culture.(2).

I should like to consider two issues with respect to Whitehouse's proposal: 1) the place of ritual in his theory and 2) the historiographical potential of his theory beyond that of the anthropological data from Papua New Guinea in terms of which he formulated it (Ch. 8).

#### 1. Ritual: A causal or correlative variable?

It is clear from *Arguments and Icons* that ritual is central to Whitehouse's larger theory of modes of

religiosity. Whitehouse does not, however, offer a theory of ritual *per se* but includes ritual in a set of variables that tend to cluster in one of two identifiable "tendencies towards particular patterns of codification, transmission, cognitive processing, and political association" (p. 1), tendencies that he terms "doctrinal" and "imagistic". Whitehouse contends that four primary variables make up the "doctrinal" tendency: 1) a digital or discursive style of codification which may be found in nonliterate contexts but is most often characteristic of literate societies or of those influenced by them, 2) transmission by means of repetitive ritual and routinized instruction, 3) cognitive processing in terms of the generalized schemas characteristic of the semantic memory system and 4) wide dissemination of tradition as constitutive of large, imagined communities in which group affinities are largely anonymous. By contrast, the four primary variables of an imagistic mode of religiosity identified by Whitehouse are 1) an analogic or imagistic style of codification, 2) transmission through infrequently performed rituals rendered memorable through intense sensory pageantry and heightened emotionality, 3) cognitive processing through the episodic memory system in which events are encoded as unique and intensely personalized experiences and 4) an enduring cohesion of small, face-to-face communities of participants (Whitehouse 1995: 197, Table 5).

In both of the modes described by Whitehouse, the transmission of cultural knowledge through rituals includes, of course, knowledge about those rituals themselves and in this transmission, as others have argued, rituals tend toward certain predictable forms structured in terms of a tacit cognitive competence (Lawson and McCauley 1990; McCauley and Lawson, in press). Ritual, it would seem, is a variable that is as much a candidate for dependent as for independent status.

The question, in other words, is where, or whether, ritual fits into a chain of causality among the correlated elements identified by Whitehouse as defining the two modes of religiosity he describes. This issue of causality is central to the question of whether the features of Whitehouse's theoretical model have only descriptive value for the specific data he adduces or whether it might have explanatory and, thus, generalizable validity, as he intends (pp. 1, 2, 146).

In his earlier ethnography, *Inside the Cult* (1995), which provides the fascinating data for his theoretical hypotheses, Whitehouse clearly states his view that it is a group's "style of codification", i.e., what a group selects to remember and the processing of that memory, that is "more basic than other kinds of differences, lying as...[it does] at the roots of a series of causal chains which encompass all [of the other] variables" (Whitehouse 1995: 196-197). It is, after all, organized groups that preside over, maintain and regulate the performance of their rituals (3). For example, a group that codifies its cultural knowledge nondiscursively in terms, say, of kin relations would quite naturally select admission to the kin group as occasions for ritualization (4). As such kinship-based occasions are both periodic and personal, e.g., birth, initiation, adoption, marriage, their ritualization would be infrequent and would tend to involve a high degree of sensory pageantry which, in turn, would activate the episodic memory system and its character of vivid recall (Boyer 2001: 260-261). The "rites of terror" associated with initiation among some of the indigenous peoples studied by Whitehouse (and others) in Papua New Guinea represent a *locus classicus* for the particularly memorable character of these rituals among their participants and thus for their enduring nature (Ch. 1). Large-scale traditions, on the other hand, with their large heterogenous populations of anonymous subjects would select regular (and regulated) instruction and apologia in an attempt to establish, maintain and control some sort of discursive homogeneity by an institutionalized practice of routinized memorization. Whitehouse's example for this modality is the influence of Christian missionary religions in Papua New Guinea (Ch. 2) and, more speculatively, the European Protestant Reformation (Ch. 7). The activation of memory, whether episodic or semantic, is necessary for the relatively stable perseverance of either the

imagistic or the doctrinal mode over time and, as cognitive possibilities of common human brain functions, explains an inevitable influence of one upon the other. It is the mixture and perseverance of the two modes that is most characteristic of recorded history.

## **2. Modes of religiosity and historical research**

Whitehouse suggests that the imagistic mode of religion is characteristic of hunter-gather peoples, appearing perhaps as early as the Upper Palaeolithic (pp. 3, 161-169). The doctrinal mode of religiosity is, on the other hand, a relatively recent development documented only from 6000 B.C. with the emergence of centralized temple states in Mesopotamia (pp. 162, 169-172). In this latter modality, individualistic (or local) associations encoded in the episodic memory system become transformed into the connected and propositional generalizations preserved in semantic memory and provide the basis for the very idea of "history". This notion is an exemplum of the doctrinal mode and historiography its discursive practice.

The emergence of interconnected narrative as the dominant modality of sociopolitical organization did not herald the demise of the imagistic since both represent cognitive possibilities of every human brain. If, in other words, we are accurately to write a "history" of those peoples for whom cultural knowledge is imagistically encoded, then we must learn to evaluate the surviving data in terms commensurate with their mode of codification and transmission.

Given the incomplete data that are characteristic of the historical record generally, from both literate as well as nonliterate societies, social scientists at least since Marx have suggested that well-articulated social scientific models might be employed to correct or even to supplement the historical record. The question, of course – and it is raised by many of these social scientific researchers themselves, as well as by their critics – is to what extent "it is possible...to apply propositions developed in one time and place to other eras and cultures" (Stark 1996: 21-22) (5). Actually, the theoretical issues of historiography are not so dissimilar from those of anthropology; while the former is defined by a temporal remove from which much of the data have not survived, the latter is defined by a spatial remove in which much of the data are not sufficiently accessible. Recognizing this theoretical similarity, one historian has proposed an "anthropological mode of history" that would attempt to show how ordinary people "construed the world...and infused it with emotion", how they "organized reality in their minds and expressed it in their behavior" (Darnton 1984: 3, 6) (6). While such an approach anticipates the possibility of Whitehouse's cognitive historiography, the appealing feature of Whitehouse's model is that it incorporates but goes beyond the descriptive metaphors, typologies or sets of concepts previously employed by social scientists and the historians influenced by them (Stark 1996: 25; Whitehouse 1995: 203-217; 2000: 3-4) to advance a theoretical explanation grounded in shared features of human cognition, offering, thereby a falsifiable premise for transcultural and transhistorical generalization (p. 11).

Should Whitehouse's modes model be empirically substantiated, a probative venture to which he invites any interested reader (p. 188), would its employment in historical research imply that if a certain number (two? three?) of the variables he identifies are documented in the historical record, we might predict that the others would likely have been present also? If, for example, historians document the existence of a particular, face-to-face group that practiced initiation rites and for which only iconographical evidence survives, might we be able to conclude, apart from the discovery of additional data but with some probability,

that the initiation rites of this group would likely have been characterized by high emotional arousal? that it is unlikely that this group would also have produced a now unfortunately lost discursive narrative record despite their situatedness in the midst of a wider literate culture? and that, whatever the attractions of its contemporaneous competitors, this group would never have been successful in establishing itself beyond the boundaries of its small-group sociology? These are the sorts of questions that will, of course, require testing against better documented anthropological and historical data if the explanatory potential of Whitehouse's theory is to be confirmed (7).

## Conclusion

Neither ritual itself nor the frequency of its performance is, in Whitehouse's theory, an independent variable underlying the establishment of the differing modes of religiosity he describes nor is ritual the consequential practice of religious commitment but rather ritual represents those mechanisms whereby culture and cognition are connected. Whereas differing frequencies of ritual performance do activate differing systems of memory with implications for socio-political organization, ritual itself, according to Whitehouse's theory, seems to be driven by a group's particular style of codification which provides in the first place a prior social field and antecedent cognitive domain. It is in the mnemonic transmission of this "before" (Arist. *Mem.* 450. 19-22) that ritual frequency and a consequent ritual form become selected for; and it is in the mnemonic transmission of this "before" that the idea of "history" originates. As a consequence of social feedback and reinforcement, the sequence of codification-transmission-cognitive processing-political association is, of course, more muddled in historical actuality than in its theoretical (and explanatory) construction. And, although the anthropological and historical study of rituals must always situate and explain these practices in their muddled historical context, they must also be situated, according to Whitehouse's view, in terms of their differential modal catchment. This catchment, in turn, may well provide an explanatory heuristic whereby historians of religion may more completely and accurately assess their anthropological and historiographical reconstructions.

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1. I refer to the examples from the so-called Hellenistic mystery cults from my own field of expertise and to those of numerous exclusivistic initiation rites described by anthropologists as well as to a long tradition of scholarship fascinated by "secret" cults and of political establishments fearful of them.
2. Pascal Boyer's recently published *Religion Explained* (2001) must now be included in this judgement. Previous works that have been concerned with cognitive theory and culture (primarily religion) include: Lawson 1994; Lawson-McCauley 1990; Boyer 1994; Sperber 1996; Mithen 1996.
3. Whitehouse's modes of religiosity theory is less a theory of social formation than a theory of social transmission and organization; see, however, Whitehouse 2000: 51, where he notes a relationship between ritual frequency and social formation. Nor does he address primarily the issue of religious origins (p. 3).
4. Kinship, or the claim to kinship, is the most likely basis for early human social organization (Martin 2001).
5. As summarized by one historian of Mediterranean antiquity: "The perceptions and attitudes about change which we take for granted in modern industrial societies are in almost every case inappropriate to the conditions of...[traditional societies]. Neither the extreme individualism that is the presupposition of the lore and practice of personal advancement in industrial democracies nor the class structure essential to conventional Marxist analysis has a place in the ancient...world" (Meeks 1983: 20).

6. The French term for this history with "an ethnographic grain" is *l'histoire des mentalités* (Darnton 1984: 3).
7. I hope elsewhere to demonstrate in some detail that the Roman cult of Mithraism instantiates these premises (Martin, forthcoming).

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*Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Harvey Whitehouse, Oxford Univ. Press, 2000)

Reviewed by *Tom Sjoblom* (University of Helsinki - Finland)

[pages 34-37]

*Arguments and icons* is a book about the role of experience in religious interaction and transmission of religious representations. The role of emotions in the construction of religious representations has been fundamental to the scholarly discussions on religion (see Proudfoot 1985; Andresen 2001, 7-16). In this respect, this study by Harvey Whitehouse is nothing new - as pointed out by Whitehouse himself (p.3). Indeed, a very close parallel - not mentioned by Whitehouse - can be found in the writings of William James, who argued that there are two different kinds of religiosity, *institutional* and *personal*, and two different types of knowledge, *conceptual* ("knowledge-about") and *emotional* ("knowledge of acquaintance"). James argues that emotional knowledge is the more basic of these two and is constructed from the sensations and first-hand experiences of the individual in question. Conceptual knowledge, on the other hand, is developed from the emotional knowledge by conceptualizing and analyzing the information received and placing it among the knowledge structures of the cognitive system in question (James 1907, 221-223; 1960, 48).

Emotion theory has changed quite dramatically during the last decades, and to a large extent this has been due to the work done in the field of cognitive science (1). It is at this point, where *Arguments and icons* differs from its predecessors, William James included. The latter had many insights that later research has proven to be more or less correct. However, at his time there was not enough information available to build a detailed and empirically relevant theory to combine and bring together these insights into a universal cognitive theory of the modes of religiosity. This is what Whitehouse attempts in his book, which I take to be a major step forward in the research of the mechanisms for transmitting religious representations (p.4).

The argument of Whitehouse is that there are two modes of religiosity, which he calls *doctrinal* and *imagistic* modes, and that on the level of cognitive processing, the two modes rely on very different memory systems (p.9-10). Doctrinal religiosity is routinized and based on frequent repetition of both ritual and dogma. The transmission of doctrinal religiosity relies on the construction of schematic representations and the use of semantic memory (p.9-10). By contrast, imagistic religiosity is particularistic, based on lasting episodic memories of sacred events. The transmission of imagistic religiosity relies on the strength and inviolability of the memories of unique episodes in the lives of individuals and, therefore, the representations it produces are primarily encoded in episodic memory (p. 10). Whitehouse points out that in real life, all religious traditions depend on both doctrinal and imagistic modes of transmission. Nevertheless, important and quite extensive sociological implications can be distinguished, depending on which one of the two modes is essential for the identity-formation of any given religious tradition (p. 11-12).

One of the predictions leading from the hypothesis is that memories of individual acts, like

performances of religious rituals, have a relatively short life span in the minds of the participants in doctrinal religiosity. For example, most participants in a Christian liturgy can produce a schematic description of the ritual when requested to do that, but they are incapable of remembering any particular occasion of liturgy if it did not take place in the near past (p. 51). In imagistic religiosity it is possible to maintain rituals with no general scheme present. Every time a ritual is performed, it is constructed individually from the memory traces of the individuals that participated in similar rituals on previous occasions. In *Arguments and icons* the example *par excellence* of such imagistic rituals is the initiation system of the Baktaman of New Guinea, where initiation rituals are performed approximately only once every decade (p. 57, 105-109).

In the case of the Baktaman, the accurate recollections of past ritual episodes are promoted by an explicit and systematic creation of flashbulb memories (p. 119). This is reached partly by teaching the ritual experts to focus on remembering graphic actions, instead of great volumes of verbal exegesis or mythology (p. 107). However, the most important tool here is to create rituals where the participants' emotions are aroused and stimulated in various and often surprising ways, including dancing to the point of exhaustion, being prevented from sleeping, eating strange and disgusting concoctions etc. (See Barth 1975, 64-65; Whitehouse 1992; McCauley 2001, 117-123). The Baktaman case presents an extreme case of imagistic religiosity and could, therefore, be discarded as not very typical for the transmission of religious representations in general. However, by extending his discussion of modes of religiosity from Melanesia to the Christian Europe of the Reformation period and to the Upper Palaeolithic cultures, Whitehouse demonstrates that it is possible to apply the scheme to more conventional and less extreme forms of recollecting ritual experiences (p. 147-188).

For example, in Finland the great seasonal celebrations can be roughly divided into those with a close relationship with the Christian doctrine (e.g. Christmas and Easter) and those with a more ambiguous and diffuse doctrinal background (e.g. Midsummer and New Year celebrations). Interestingly, most Finns seem to possess a relatively clear idea of how and why Christmas and Easter are celebrated. Indeed, while rituals connected with both of these feasts have changed in the course of time, the basic ritual patterns for both have remained intact including e.g. special foods, decorations and attending church services. Moreover, everyone is also aware of why these two feasts are celebrated according to the Christian doctrine (2).

In contrast, Midsummer and New Year celebrations do not seem to create the same kind of schematic recollections, although both of them are very important for Finns. For the present discussion, Midsummer celebrations are more interesting of the two, because as the feast day of John the Baptist, it also has a place in the Christian ritual system. Still, most Finns do not make this connection. I doubt that younger generations are even aware of the Christian exegesis for Midsummer celebrations. For most Finns, Midsummer is simply the celebration of summer and the beginning of summer vacation. Some traditions, like the heavy use of alcohol, burning of bonfires and dancing, are present, but in contrast to Christmas and Easter traditions, no shared doctrines or institutionalized exegesis are involved. People are allowed to create their own memories and their own interpretations of what is going on.

It should be noted that when it comes to the actual rites connected with the seasonal celebrations, there are no clear differences with regard to the emotional force present in them or in the nature of practices involved; having a decorated spruce in the living room is probably no less an emotional experience as dancing around a bonfire. What distinguishes these two types of celebration from each other is how the participants are able to cognitively process the emotions evoked in them. In the case of the more doctrinal celebrations, the processing of emotion motivated information is directly connected with thematic cognitive

structures maintained by the frequent exposure to the cultural exegesis of the meaning of the rituals performed. In the case of Midsummer, however, no such shared schematic structures appear to be present, so the information achieved is remembered as unique and often vivid episodes connected with a particular Midsummer rather than to Midsummer celebrations in general.

In his earlier monograph, *Inside the cult*, Whitehouse provides a list of thirteen contrasting variables distinguishing doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity from each other (Whitehouse 1995, 197). Eleven of the thirteen features that, according to Whitehouse, belong to imagistic religiosity are present in the Finnish Midsummer celebrations. Only the frequency of transmission and the level of social cohesion present appear not to accord with the model, because the Midsummer celebration is, by definition, a repetitive ritual with a comparatively diffused social cohesion. However, the lack of social cohesion might here be illusionary depending on how the celebrating community is defined. While Midsummer celebrations, like burning bonfires, dancing and drinking, are often performed in large crowds, on the cognitive level the actual rituals attached to them are actually performed on the level of family groups or among small communities of close friends. So, while nearly everybody partakes in the celebrations, instead of viewing the celebrations occurring in one large community with relatively diffused social cohesion, there actually are a number of related but independent rituals going on simultaneously among many small but intensely cohesive communities. If this is the case, the requirement for social cohesion is also fulfilled in the case of the present example.

In contrast, the frequency hypothesis put forward by Whitehouse appears problematic in the light of the present discussion. Whitehouse argues that the impact of emotional stimulation is necessary for the recollection of imagistic rituals. For him the level of cultivating emotions and sensations in a ritual situation is connected with how frequently the ritual in question is performed. Infrequently performed rituals should, therefore, have a higher level of emotional stimulation involved in order to project to the participants lasting memories of what has been going on (p. 100-112). However, as pointed out above there is no clear difference in the emotional force present in the imagistically coded Midsummer rituals and the doctrinal rituals of Christmas and Easter celebrations. While the measure of emotional force is often hard to define, one could even argue that the latter celebrations have a higher level of emotional stimulation present. Still, all of these celebrations and their rituals are performed with the same frequency.

Therefore, in the case of the Finnish seasonal celebrations and rituals the frequency of performances appears not to be a decisive factor for determining how strong emotional stimulation is present in a ritual. Instead, what appears to influence the way in which the individuals memorize the rituals is the level of cultural integration involved in their performances. Christmas and Easter are major Christian celebrations, while Midsummer is only of secondary importance. Due to this it has not been necessary to create a dogmatic and authoritative explanation of why and how Midsummer should be celebrated. When a shared cultural explanation of the rituals is missing, the only way to remember and transmit cognitive images of Midsummer rituals is through one's personal experiences and, as pointed out by Whitehouse, the vividness and detail of people's memories are partly related to the level emotional arousal involved (p. 30). The frequency of performances appears not to be an issue here at all.

Nevertheless, the evidence provided by Whitehouse to back up his case is convincing and there also exists independent experimental evidence that clearly points out how emotion enhances memory (e.g. LeDoux 1998, 179-224; Greenfield 2000, 102). However, the same experimental evidence also points out that there are actually two different memory systems present: one that forms explicit memories available for



conscious recollection at some later time, and another operating outside the consciousness creating implicit and personalized bodily constructed cognitive biases and images, i.e. what Antonio Damasio has referred to as somatic markers (Damasio 1994, 173-200; LeDoux 1998, 181). In his discussion of imagistic religiosity, Whitehouse appears to be dealing with conscious recollections, especially with a special type of episodic remembering known as "flashbulb memories" (p. 7). Flashbulb memories are typically created during traumatic emotional events like earthquakes and, according to Whitehouse, emotionally intense religious rituals, like the Baktaman initiation rites, where participants are exposed to physical and psychological torture (p. 90).

However, although many religious rituals certainly include emotional or imagistic elements, I would like to argue that their emotional recollection does not take place on a conscious level but unconsciously on the level of somatic markers. Thus, the recollection of such imagistic rites as those connected with the Finnish Midsummer celebrations has more to do with the experience that everything is going just as it should than with the actual recollection of how the rites should be actually performed. I have here in mind something in line of what Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi has called "flow" i.e. an optimal experience, where it does not matter as such what one is engaged in doing, as long as what one does is experienced to be in line with the cues provided by the somatic markers evoked by the situation at hand. Csikszentmihalyi himself suggests, although without any further elaboration, that religious rituals are the oldest instruments for providing justification for flow-producing behavior. Furthermore, Ilkka Pyysiäinen has argued that "flow" is the process that creates mystical experience in religious traditions (See Csikszentmihalyi 1991, 49, 71-77, 103-106; 1994 179-179; Pyysiäinen 1996, 80-85).

An obvious objection for viewing the role of emotions in ritual activity in this manner is to argue that rituals do not just happen, that they are meaningful behavior guided by tradition.

Indeed, ritual events are traditional in the sense that they are performed with reference to previous occurrences of the same type of social event. However, this does not mean that the memories attached to them are truthful in the sense of being exact copies of what happened during the previous performance of the ritual in question (Boyer 1990, 1-3). As pointed out by Whitehouse, different kinds of external memory stores, like literacy, might be used to promote more stable memories of rituals, but in the end it is the autobiographical and imagistic memories of individuals that keep rituals alive (p.172-185). In many cases it is the optimal experience that what is being done in a ritual has real effects, which explains why people participate in them in the first place. Pascal Boyer points out that this is how nonreligious people often explain their own participation in religious performances such as weddings and funerals, and I would like to add that the same applies apparently to ritual behavior in the so-called folk-religiosity in general (Boyer 2001, 261).

In conclusion, the neuroscientist and Nobel Laureate Gerald Edelman has pointed out that emotions may be considered the most complex of mental processes insofar as they mix with all other processes, including history and social interaction (Edelman 1992, 176). In *Arguments and icons* Whitehouse converts this complexity into a methodological tool that enables him to provide new insights into the human cognition and ritual behavior by combining psychology and neuroscience with historical and anthropological ethnography. As a historian of religions I am especially taken by the possibilities of this theory to function as a basis of historical research on the formation and development of different religious traditions. My critical comments dealt with the way Whitehouse, by stressing the role of flashbulb memories, provides a somewhat monolithic description of emotional memory, while in reality we seem to be dealing with a wide

spectrum of varieties of emotional memories. Actually, my understanding is that Whitehouse implicitly recognizes this fact, as his discussion of the religious modes present in the Era of the European Reformation seem to confirm (p.150-159). Nevertheless, it might be necessary to make this aspect of emotional memories more explicit in the future and in connection with it discuss what possible consequences this may have on the theory in general.

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### Endnotes

1. A recent review of the developments in emotion theory can be found in Frijda, Manstead & Bem 2000, 1-9.
2. It should be noted that the present discussion is not based on any systematic collection of ethnographic data. I am basing my description on the preliminary observations made for a field project under planning.

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*Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Harvey Whitehouse, Oxford Univ. Press, 2000)

Reviewed by *Garry W. Trompf* (Professor in the History of Ideas, The University of Sydney)

[pages 38-43]

This book certainly calls for discussion in this journal, since it considers religiosity very much in terms of ritual. There are apparent advantages with the general approach: rituals are visible and enacted so that at least one can say something definite about ‘external marks.’ In this work Harvey Whitehouse has confidence enough to assert that sufficient externals of ritual life have been left over from upper paleolithic sites that we can draw some useful comparisons between them and traditional Melanesian rites and initiations. The “labyrinthine galleries” of the Pyrenees and the inchoate mystery of animals used in New Guinea Baktaman initiations are linked across the vast expanse of time as “imagistic,” because enough by way of outer forms is left over to allow us to deduce this. The inner (including unconscious) dimensions of religion become less intangible and unmanageable with this method because they can always be tied in with something ‘expressively solid.’ This is a characteristic propensity in anthropological writing that those of us who are ‘doing’ Studies in Religion have learnt to spot - yet to question!

One has to be clear, of course, about Whitehouse’s major thesis concerning divergence in modes of religiosity. To be fair, he is not (although he sometimes seems to be) exploring the differences between Christianity in general and Melanesian traditional religions. He is above all comparing Christian forms and practices as they have appeared in Melanesia with select traditional rituals there, and his attentions to the region are almost exclusively given to Papua New Guinea. While he approaches questions of cognition, experience and inner feelings, however, he typically bases his conclusions about religious difference on the affects/effects of outward ritual or a cultus. Thus his most consistent accentuation is that that Melanesian traditionalist outlooks have been held collectively through “flashbulb memories” (à la Kulick) of unencoded, mysterious images, especially conveyed in perceptible revelations at initiation ceremonies. The events generating this “imagistic mode of religiosity” occur only very episodically, with the disclosures being of very local things and actions, belonging only to a single ritual community. Trauma and terror are often entailed, forging a powerful bond between initiates. In contrast, Christian worshippers are a collection of

anonymous individuals, yet the purpose of the habitual, week-by-week participation in the cultus of churches is to receive a shared, more or less clearly explained universalized schema - with preached meanings to be stored as a structured and settled code for regional or national life rather than left as a vivid memory with flashes of "indiscriminate details" (esp. pp. 120-1). The divergent religious modes, we note, can be discerned through reflection on outward forms.

The most interesting argument in the book is that Melanesian new religious movements spring up in reaction against the newly introduced, 'foreign' mode of religious cognition, and thus inherit some of its problems. The cognitive tension is often solved by splinter-group activities, along with maneuvers by leaders, that allow members to recapture the imagistic mode - from intense moments of vivid memory - and absorb mystery as reinforcement of a new movement. This means that the study of relevant adjustments going on in Melanesian so-called 'cargo cults,' independent churches, and so forth, will confirm the general theory of 'polar tugs' between the iconic and discursive (or argumentative) modes of Melanesian religiosity. Again the focus is on the ritual expressions of these movements.

Although he conducts explorations into prehistoric religions and African materials, Whitehouse seems reluctant to apply the theory very generally (p. 160), and he also saves himself from constructing an exaggerated binary opposition by admitting there can be overlap between the two modes (p. 11). That is a healthy concessiveness allowing others to seek out modifications of his conclusions, but his posited dichotomy is strongly reiterated throughout the book nonetheless. A review will obviously have to deal with the possibilities and problems of this divarification.

To begin, I wonder about the use of iconic and imagistic for traditional ritual life. I am reminded here that the Coptic Orthodox Church has recently opened up important missions in Kenya (Markos: 1993-6). One wonders what is being made of this very iconically rich ecclesial tradition and whether, in Whitehouse's terms, it generates a durable imagistic, mystery-evoking, mode, or soon gets 'routinized' within a schema that includes repetitious acts and preached clarifications of the Word. That has immediately made me reflect on the great multitude of encounters between Melanesian hamleters and outsiders, and forced out of me the intuition that the mysterious phenomena of newcomers as strange-looking, and as bearing with them the most mysterious of clothes and goods, was fundamentally imagistic in impact, and leaving an indelible impress of (barely explicable) mystery on indigenous consciousness. I follow Whitehouse's logic here, yet recall how myself have early argued that, for the long-inured lithic cultures of Melanesia, however much they might have been used to adaptations and change, the coming of the whites and other foreigners was "eschatological" in implication (1979: 135-6).

It is often hard for scholars who are not used to the extraordinary range of 'contact-related' situations to fathom the different cosmic associations of 'the strangest strangers.' In my own experience, I have had a sophisticated Velerupu student lead a small deputation of University of Papua New Guinea undergraduates to me in 1972 to enquire whether I had been to heaven, because in class I had shown a slide-picture of myself in Jerusalem; in 1973 I met individuals in an ostensibly long-Catholicized mountainous area 80 miles from Port Moresby who had never talked to a whiteman and trembled at the possibility that the encounter could bring on cosmic catastrophe; in 1974 I was surrounded by fringe Bena Bena highlanders who did not want to stop coming and going to examine my skin and hair; and so on. Any analysis of the modes of religiosity will have to build on highly various human situations and also bring what we may call 'stages of curiosity' into the equation. This is why certain researchers of Melanesian new religious (or 'adjustment') movements have likened them generally to initiations (thus Gesch 1985) or *rites de passage* (Barr 1983: 130-

2). I suggest this data ought to be considered to enrich or perhaps modify Whitehouse's bi-modal paradigm.

Because I have tried to address the complexity of Melanesia in my own work, I found the selection of cases in *Arguments and Icons* worryingly limited, and even these cases have presented their own problems in the literature. Take the most deployed traditional examples. The layers of initiatory disclosures among the highland Baktaman look set to clinch the argument for the 'traditionally imagistic,' but of course Fredrik Barth, who documents them, is often commented upon as someone who deliberately avoided language meanings - he probably foresaw his own weaknesses as a linguist - so as to concentrate on performed actions. The question now hangs around, though, who is going to go back and possibly find what has been left out of a discursively expressible *Weltanschauung*? Then there is Whitehouse's intriguing deferral to the Orokaiva 'taro cults,' as documented in the 1920s by F.E. Williams, who "had great difficulty establishing the ideological bases" of the cultists' expectations. The trouble is, long afterwards, perceptive Orokaiva oral historians John Waiko (1983), and especially Wellington Jojoga Opeba (1987), delved deep enough to provide semantic content as an accompaniment to *jipari* shaking and *kasamba* dancing, and at the same time they lampooned Williams' colonialist propensity for psychopathological explanations.

When it comes to the selection of new religious movements, I can understand the concentration on the Pomio *Kivung*, because Whitehouse has carried out some brilliant fieldwork among members of this movement. One must appreciate, however, that where he carried out his investigations (esp. 1995), beyond the northern fringes of the Mengan culturo-linguistic complex and among the Maliu Bainings, he was away from the rhetorical power house of the *kivung*, on or around Jacquinot Bay (Trompf 1990a). There one found two styles of leadership side-by-side, the public, politically argumentative faces of Alois Koki and Francis Koimanrea (who became Papua New Guinea's Minister for Health) and the *tok bokis* (parabolic mystery talk) of Kolman Molu, who was leader after the old customary style for various New Britain cultures, speaking quietly to those he allowed to give him ear (but nonetheless speaking meaningfully), while maintaining an aura of the the unexplained by rarely talking to larger gatherings (cf. Valentine 1963). It was the latter's leadership that was always suspected to be secretly behind the incessant drumming that came out of *kivung* villages at night, as if talking to the Catholics that they should remember the ways of the ancestors. But what do we have here, a cunning combination of the mysterious and the habitual, the imagistic and discursive? Where does it fit into the thesis of *Arguments and Icons*? Only to show how complex the religious impulses can be one way or the other? or was there always a symbiosis of the iconic and *Bedeutungsbildung* in any case?

Whitehouse's treatment of the Paliau movement brings up comparable problems. For, while on the one hand Paliau was strong on discourse and a new message - and note how he ripped out the middle pages of the mass books that contained the cultic parts he and his lieutenants had no authority to perform - he was nevertheless so surrounded with charisma in his followers' perceptions that any appearance he made in the villages left an indelible, 'iconic' mark, allowing his requests for funds (in some few cases women) to go unquestioned (Trompf 1994: 244-5). Whitehouse wants his thesis to be corroborated in a diachronic development: the new religious movement adopts the Western discursive mode and then has need of the return to imagistic forms to endure. It needs "the Noise" and other comparable splinter-groups to keep rejuvenated (though I note he relies on Schwartz's documentations of early outbursts and does not mention the later sectlet of Pita Tapo, one not really corroborating his case anyhow, cf. Trompf 1991: 223). I am suggesting instead that with both the *kivung* and the Paliau movement some kind of symbiosis always applied. Besides, the selection of the Pomio and Paliau movements amounts to a very limited sample. We might find other movements with affairs proceeding in the opposite direction. The Mt Huru movement or

Peli Association is a fairly nearby case in point. It started with the mystery talk of Matias Yaliwan - his search for the keys of the kingdom, his apocalyptic verbiage, his relative lack of interest in a structured organization as against a vivid moment of reckoning (when the geodesic markers were taken down from the top of Huru on 7/7/1971). Yet affairs steadily proceeded towards routinized rituals under the management of Daniel Hawina, set times for traditional-looking fertility rituals being held, and eventually Christian (Canadian New Apostolic) rituals appropriated (with Yaliwan becoming somewhat marginalized) (Trompf 1994: 226-8).

As I respond to *Arguments and Icons*, I find myself warming to the rule-of-thumb usefulness of the modal dichotomy, but urged to assert my wariness because the Melanesian scenario is so diverse that instance after instance of relevant data needs to be piled up for me to be convinced by a new theoretical framework. I am even bemused by the tendency to generalize about what happens in Christian worship. Is it all so anonymous, universalizing and 'intellectualist' as Whitehouse supposes? Reflecting on years of field research, I cannot agree that it is. I can only reiterate what I said earlier about contexts. Take my visit to Kasap Catholic parish church in 1999, in high west Enga country. There is a man who takes warriors' weapons at the door to ensure they will not take them into the place of worship. These people are not entering into an anonymity: they are being persuaded to worship with people they might otherwise want to fight; the men have to sit through a ritual with women close at hand; any individual person in the congregation may be there for the first time, or it may be the first time the significance of what is happening in terms of a new society or about life has 'clicked' for someone, and so on. At Kasap, I reflect, there was always an underlying possibility of turbulence before and after the worship, because there were very many people gathered at one point; how different, then, to be in a tiny United Church village place of worship at Alepa, Rigo country, hinterland Papua in 1985. Everyone was packed in; one could barely stand without hitting the thatched roof; everyone knew each other very well - perhaps all too much so! - and the minister was as close to everyone as in any small room. Anonymity was impossible. Families would be mentioned in prayer; individuals occasionally asked by the pastor for local-specific clarification.

With these two examples I am bound to have to face up to the phenomenon of repetition, and admit a week-by-week routinization that did not pertain in traditional ritual life. But in the big Kasap Catholic church there were lots of imagistic elements - visible icons, and special sounds and actions - that made for a visible difference with the bare and virtually 'undecorated' Rigo church, with its few flowers, simple (communion) table and seats. I am not sure why Whitehouse wants to overlook those differences and lay emphasis on the storing of the verbalized meanings as the overwhelming factor in non-traditional, introduced religiosity. He seems rather 'Protestant' in his generalizations, and certainly unaware of the pre-Vatican II 'magical atmosphere' surrounding the Latin mass in Melanesia. Besides, unexpected things can happen within the routine in either kind of village church context just described. A stranger may arrive, a bishop might turn up in a visibly impressive fashion, someone may die in church, a marriage or funeral significant to individuals may occur, and the singularity of such events may have a 'flash bulb' effect. Churches in themselves, or puzzling personnel in connection with them, can also bear the the imagistic impress that Whitehouse only expects from tradition. Contemplate young Filo of Inawai'a, whose movement as a Mekeo prophetess is sparked by her encounter with bottles of holy water when she was asked to clean the village church as a schoolgirl (Fergie, 1981:96-9).

Above all, however, it is problematic to make comparisons between religiosities almost exclusively in terms of outward cultic forms. In traditional, 'transitional' and Christian contexts people can dream dreams, see visions, discern powerful significances in the environment, have eerie feelings, experience

being 'taken over' spiritually, etc., and many of these phenomena can erupt outside cultic settings. In any case, one can have anonymity inside a traditional initiation ceremony: the Wahgi novices become less and less sure who is pushing their little initiatory group closer and closer to the fire in the worst, often dehydrating ritual ordeal in the men's house. Initiatory procedures also typically have a discursive element - laws, tabus and rules are instilled, as in the Tolai *Dukduk* enclosures (Sack 1972) - and they can be routinized, because seclusion can go on for months, even years, and the custodians cannot think up new lessons to impose every day! (Bloch 1992: 3-8, yet cf. Whitehouse pp. 23-6, 51). As for church life, the so-called universalizing-and-anonymous might give way in a moment if you have to give a reading, state a testimony, take communion or speak in tongues for the first time, or even if your name is announced in connection with a social event. Different developments, also, can go on 'under the name of church.' During my very first field-trip, to Gavuone in Aroma-Velerupu country (coastal Papua) in 1972, church youth club meetings often finished with excited discussion about the monthly 'Game.' This amounted to formalized (why not say ritualized? and loosely monitored) courting, with adolescent boys and girls able to line up in the dark and then go to some quiet nearby place to get to know each other. It was not traditional practice: it was a tamed version of a famous fertility rite from Pukapuka in the Cook Islands, 'taught' at some early point by a Rarotongan pastor and adapted for Papuan 'Christian community purposes' as old relational tabus broke down. It was a component of the new order, and of various cultural innovations incorporated within church life. Ah, the complexities of Melanesia.

But that allows me to accentuate the problem of making comparisons only through outward forms - with a final set of points. What I have tried to do in my rather encyclopedic work on Melanesia, *Payback* (1994) - a work highly relevant to Whitehouse's deliberations but unfortunately not considered by him - is to plot the *shared* cognitive-rational frames of reference between traditional and 'Christianizing' Melanesians. The point is, there is a very important *discursive* feature of *traditional* cognition, integral to religiosity - and I have called it retributive or payback logic. It relates to issues of war and survival that I would have liked more accentuated in *Arguments and Icons*. It operates within a dynamic complex of thought and action which can be played on iconically - with the number of tied knots in a rope running down the great façade of the Ilahita Arapesh *haus tambaran*, for example, to denote how many required killings have been effected by the fearsome Cyclopean 'cult spirit' within (Tuzin 1976: 51); or with skulls of enemy victims sitting on the high poles of the initiation enclosures among the Negrie (Gesch 1985: 232-40). More positively, on the other hand, it is acted out as gift-giving, through food or livestock prestation - on Markham Valley Atzera frames for hanging bananas, to illustrate, or as killed beasts arranged around an ancestors' 'viewing stand' at a great pig killing ceremony (or *bugglanyunga*) of the Chimbu. But in terms of time spent, payback is more talked about than anything else, involving as it does explanations: why so-and-so is sick; why the crops are not healthy; etc., and from the traditional readily spills over to Christian talk about blessings and punishments; the breaking and keeping of law, and so on. There will even be arrival at comparison between the old sacrifices and a new (albeit eternalized) *sacrificium*, and certainly frequent discussion of differing human *relations* within the the old and new ways.

Once we explore this last-mentioned 'zone,' the bifurcation of iconic and argumentative modes of religiosity seems weakened, and their constant symbiotic relations more clearly perceived. We can distinguish better between the eidetic - I think this is a preferable word for the unencoded or not-clearly-coded showing of things - and the more obviously symbolic (what Rudolf Otto referred to as the imagic with an "overplus of meanings" [1917] 1950: 5). Not only does Whitehouse never clearly differentiate these, but he does not address the classic Vichian distinction between the metonymous and metaphoric in sign and language either (Vico [1744] 1968: 66-7), i.e., the difference between a thing or word just being and a thing

or word standing for something. Both Vico and Otto, of course, are inclined to an 'evolutionary' reading of semeiotics, as is Whitehouse himself, who in his consideration of paleolithic art, puts the iconic prior to substantive meanings. The trouble with the Melanesian materials is that they throw up such a diversity of communicative life, with lines running *pari passu* within the one culture. Who would have believed we would have found something akin to the Platonic form of things in the Fuyughe concept of *utam[e]* in the Papuan Highlands (Fastré 1937: 1-23), or 'time as being' close to the Heideggerian sense among the Keraakie (Trans-Fly) (Martin 2001)? That only goes to raise the doubt that we could ever say that the iconic precedes the argumentative, as the visibility of cave art is supposed to confirm (against this Trompf 1989) or that there ever was a "creative explosion" of visual art (Pfeiffer 1982; Whitehouse pp. 162, 165) - a metaphorical exaggeration if ever there was one for thousands of years of *ostensibly* limited activity! - when there could have been a monumental expansion of words that have been spat out, unrecoverably, into the multitudinous vortices of air (see Trompf 1990b:134-41).

But for a book to have provoked so much reactivity for me, I should admit that it was certainly worth its author putting such a stimulating case.

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### **Conjectures, Refutations, and Verification: towards a testable theory of 'modes of religiosity'**

Review Forum, *Harvey Whitehouse* (The Queen's University of Belfast)

[pages 44-59]

My friends who were admirers of Marx, Freud, and Adler, were impressed by a number of points common to all their theories, and especially by their apparent *explanatory* power. These theories... seemed to have an effect of intellectual conversion or revelation, opening your eyes to a new truth hidden from those not yet initiated. Once your eyes were thus opened you saw confirming instances everywhere: the world was full of *verifications* of the theory. Whatever happened always confirmed it... It was precisely this fact – that they always fitted, that they were always confirmed – which in the eyes of their admirers constituted the strongest argument in favour of these theories. It began to dawn on me that this apparent strength was in fact their weakness.

(Popper 1963: 34-5, emphases in original).

### Summary

Most of the contributors to this review forum share with me certain fundamental assumptions concerning the general nature of explanation in the social and cognitive sciences. Explanatory theories, we agree, should be explicit, precise, consistent with the weight of available evidence, generalizable in principle, and testable in practice. Speculations, assuming they can be tested, may pay off in the long run but the chances of success are greatly increased if speculation can be founded upon assumptions parsimonious enough to be supported by what we already know. So we have license to be ambitious but there are limits to how high we can fly.

On the whole, the contributors to this review forum have judged *Arguments and Icons* to measure up reasonably well by these criteria. But, as they also point out, the book could have been better on a number of fronts. I welcome their critical observations and suggestions for improvement just as warmly as their generous praise. It is only through such processes of critical engagement, and ultimately of collaboration, that we can hope to test and develop many of the specific predictions advanced by the theory of modes of religiosity. Some of the criticisms raised in this review forum will be directly countered, others accepted and used as a basis for further modifications and refinements to the theory. I hope, however, that this will be only part of a wider and more enduring dialogue, through which systematic cross-disciplinary collaboration in the study of the cognitive causes of religion might spread and flourish.

### **Psychological Explanations of Religion**

Contrary to certain intellectual traditions in social and cultural anthropology (1), I assume that cultural meanings in general (and religious ideas in particular) are located only in human minds, and do not migrate above or between them. Society is not greater than the sum of its parts, nor is culture external to individual minds. Both are merely distributions of (countless and enormously complex) mental events, responding cumulatively to present and prior interactions between individuals and their environments. These mental events and interactions together seem to form patterns that we, as a species, have specialized capacities for recognizing and interpreting. It is helpful to assign labels to these patterns, for instance to describe certain forms of political association as ‘hierarchical’ or ‘centralized’. People everywhere do this kind of thing, regardless of whether or not they have been trained in an academic tradition of social theory. People talk of political offices (the ‘monarch’, the ‘chief’, etc.) and items of culture (‘the ‘painting’, the ‘book’, etc.) as if they constituted meaningful categories outside the minds of individuals. They don’t. The office of king or chief is a mental concept; paintings and books are just arrangements of colours and marks on pieces of paper or canvas. Even clouds in the sky are not really ‘clouds’ but only distributions of moisture in the air. What makes these distributions into shapes, with the meaning of clouds, are the highly structured and complex operations of perceptual and cognitive equipment in human brains. Although distributions of certain things (whether social, meteorological, or some other) can be translated into patterns, the act of translation is a mental process and the patterns themselves are mental products. Insofar as these mental processes and products become distributed in ways that we can recognize, they appear to us as varieties of social morphology and cultural form. But they remain distributions of mental phenomena and nothing more.

As long as we remember this, we can use conventional (including specialist) labels for the cultural patterns we perceive and cognize. But, because they are really just distributions of mental events and processes, they can be explained in terms of general psychological properties. Most mental events have little effect on other people. Some, however, become recognizably recurrent (not as duplicated mental states but at least as relevantly similar ones across populations). In many cases, it is not a matter of similar but of *complementary* schemas becoming widespread – such that differently distributed knowledge produces varied ‘divisions of labour’ (2). Patterns of distribution are best envisaged as outcomes of selection, and the task of explanation is really one of identifying the factors driving selection (see Sperber 1996). In *Arguments and Icons*, as well as in subsequent publications (Whitehouse 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c), I have suggested that two variables are of particular importance in this process of selection: memory and motivation. To be transmitted successfully, actions and ideas must be capable of being recalled but people must also be motivated to repeat them, and so to pass them on.

Where some of the contributors to this review forum take issue with the details of my argument, if not with the general epistemology outlined above, is in relation to my account of the sources of motivation that drive transmission. For me, religious motivation derives from the activation of various forms of revelation. Pascal Boyer argues that it derives instead from evolved mechanisms of contamination avoidance. Fredrik Barth suggests that it may derive at least in part from forms of unconscious processing, discussed in some of his earlier work with reference to psychoanalytic theory (e.g. Barth 1987: Chapter 9). Sjoblom urges us to look instead at a range of emotionally-driven effects suggested by a theory of ‘somatic markers’. The only contributor directly challenging the wisdom of searching for intra-psychic explanations in the first place is, perhaps, Michael Houseman. Let’s begin by addressing these viewpoints in turn.

Of all the above contributors, Boyer has done the most to advance our knowledge of the causal role of

cognitive mechanisms in the selection of religious concepts. In a major corpus of research in this area (Boyer 1990, 1993, 1994, 1996, 2001a), Boyer has shown how a limited number of evolved (and therefore universal) predispositions to process information in certain ways, accounts for the cross-cultural recurrence of precisely those representations of extranatural agency that are found in the ethnographic record. The cognitive predispositions with which Boyer is concerned are exceptionally well understood within cognitive and development psychology. The claim that they confer a transmissive advantage on religious representations actually documented, as opposed to a much larger variety of possible representations, has been supported experimentally in studies by Boyer and his collaborators (see Boyer 2001b: 87, fn7 and Boyer and Ramble *forthcoming*). It is a further strength of Boyer's approach that he has recently enriched and extended his account of the evolutionary foundations of the selectional mechanisms that explain certain aspects of religion everywhere (Boyer 2001a).

The central thrust of Boyer's critique of *Arguments and Icons* is that there is no need to go beyond some very parsimonious evolved cognitive constraints in explaining the divergent modes of religiosity with which my book was concerned. Boyer agrees with me that the two modes constitute real distributions, requiring an explanation. He agrees that the explanation lies in the organization of cognition, which favours certain distributions rather than others, operating on the principle of selection. And he endorses many of the specific hypotheses I advanced with regard to the divergent effects of alternative systems of memory, on 'patterns' of codification, transmission, and political association. Where Boyer disagrees with me is on the question of what *motivates* the forms of ritual action through which divergent modes of religiosity are reproduced.

For Boyer, the reason people perform rituals is because they 'activate, albeit in a heightened and grotesque way, perfectly normal cognitive systems specialized in the detection of and protection against contaminants in the natural environment' (p 10). This parsimonious explanation, developed convincingly by neuropsychologists in the study of obsessive-compulsive disorder, is all we really need to explain the global recurrence of organized rituals. Asking people why they perform rituals is a fruitless exercise. According to Boyer, people seldom have ready-made answers to such questions but, even if they had, these would explain very little. Contamination avoidance – which *really* explains the global recurrence of rituals – is not, on the whole, consciously recognized. So any reasons people make up, or pass on, to explain their behaviour are really just *post hoc* rationalizations, rather than explanations (see also Boyer 2001a: 262-3). In light of this, Boyer regards as potentially misguided my attempt in *Arguments and Icons* to show that: (a) rituals produce revelations; (b) these revelations help to motivate subsequent transmission; (c) revelations are valued because of the social bonds they create. In relation to all three points, however, I think my position can be effectively defended.

Why should rituals ever provide occasions for revelation? The answer has to do with the nature of ritual itself. A number of properties may be associated with ritualization (3), but the most salient of these for the purposes of my argument is that ritual actions are always non-technical actions, in certain respects. In part, what enables us to recognize an action as ritualized is a lack of 'technical motivations' (Sperber 1975) with regard to at least some details of the prescribed action scheme. Religious people in various parts of the world do a huge variety of strange things in the context of rituals that participants and observers intuitively recognize to be entirely superfluous to any technical purpose. Alternatively expressed, rituals lack any *intrinsic* intentional meaning (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994). The inferential processes entailed in ordinary communication become ineffective in the ritual context, and judgements of relevance insufficient to drive shared interpretations (see Sperber and Wilson 1986). This makes rituals potentially *puzzling* forms of action. They allow an exceptionally wide range of possible interpretations or 'exegesis'.

As a kind of shorthand, we might refer to the process of inventing ritual meanings as one of ‘spontaneous exegetical reflection’ or SER (Whitehouse 2002b, 2002c). Under certain conditions, the process of SER can be inspirational, moving, and epiphanic. This is one route to what we might call ‘religious revelation’. But people do not always respond to rituals in this way. Another possibility is that people are told explicitly the one and only authoritative meaning of a ritual, and obstructed in various ways from speculating further. This too can involve forms of revelation, but of a very different kind. In certain fundamentalist religious movements, for instance, people may be told that the original (and thus most authentic) meaning of a given ritual has been discovered and, in the process of being persuaded of this, may adopt attitudes of righteous dogmatism that have an intense (some might say ‘fanatical’) character. Inspiration and revelation are part of this process, even though the psychological mechanisms involved may be rather different (but not completely different) from those entailed in SER. A further possibility is that people entertain no exegetical knowledge with respect to the rituals they perform.

In *Arguments and Icons*, I developed the ‘frequency hypothesis’ to account for these three scenarios, based on ideas originally advanced in earlier work (especially Whitehouse 1992 and 1995; see also McCauley 2001). SER, I predict, will be most virulent in circumstances of rare, climactic ritual transmission. A good example would be the agonies of ritualized septum-piercing experienced by Ankave boys in Papua New Guinea (Bonnemere 2001). The boys are told little or nothing in the way of exegesis, although they know that the ritual actions are not technically-motivated. The experience is remembered for the rest of their lives and it remains profoundly puzzling. In the course of life, many subsequent experiences (especially their involvement in the initiations of other boys) remind them of their traumatic ordeal and clues as to its possible symbolic properties gradually mount up. Knowledge of this sort is constructed slowly over the course of a lifetime at increasingly higher levels of explicitness (eventually available as cross-domain analogic processing). The generation of SER in such circumstances is an intensely revelatory experience. Barth’s (1975) account of this kind of religious experience still stands out as the fullest and most penetrating ever published.

Consider, by contrast, processes of revelation among followers of Martin Luther in sixteenth-century Europe. For them, novel ideas concerning (among other things) the exegesis of Christian liturgical rites constituted a major source of revelation (e.g. McGrath 1993). These revelations were not, however, generated via processes of SER, but delivered through a highly persuasive corpus of religious teachings transmitted orally, and sustained through extremely frequent rehearsal and repetition, primarily in the form of sermons. Routinization, however, opens up other possibilities, including the third scenario identified above in which exegesis is lost altogether. For instance, most contemporary Lutheran worshippers in Finland could not tell you why the minister faces away from his congregation at various points during the church service. Frequent repetition can result in such deeply habituated forms of action that its performance requires no explicit knowledge at all. And lack of reflection on *how* to participate can inhibit reflection on *why* one participates, consequently restricting the production of SER. This makes people susceptible to authoritative exegesis, and routinization provides a favourable climate for its transmission. But what if this potential is not realized? We end up with empty procedures, aspects of the ritual process that hold no meaning for most participants.

So, while rituals *can* be associated with revelatory knowledge, this is not always the case. One aim of the theory of modes of religiosity is to explain when, how, and why these processes of revelation are activated. The next question, of course, is whether these revelatory processes can be among the motivations driving ritual participation and transmission. Boyer says they cannot, because the ‘real’ causes must be psychological mechanisms that are both universal (cross-culturally invariable) and outside conscious

awareness. There are two reasons to resist this conclusion.

First, we cannot explain variables in terms of constants. Some religious adherents give up all their rituals voluntarily, while others would lay down their lives to preserve them. Boyer's contamination-avoidance mechanism, construed as a pan-human disposition towards ritual participation, cannot explain the kind of variable commitment which is at issue.

Second, I can think of no good reason to suppose that all cognitive causes of religion (or of any other cultural domain) reside exclusively in implicit mechanisms. Consider the case of language (as does Boyer, pp 9-10). Many grammatical rules are undeniably applied via implicit mechanisms but it is also perfectly possible to be conscious of the process. For instance, until about seven years ago, I used the word 'however' quite freely as a conjunction, until it was pointed out to me by a colleague that this was a literary *faux pas*. For some time afterwards, I was conscious of adjusting my speech to accommodate this 'new' rule, just as I have, since my schooldays, tended quite deliberately to anticipate and to avoid split infinitives and other such verbal or written transgressions. Clearly, most of my grammatical knowledge is applied implicitly, even if some of it is in principle capable of being formulated explicitly. But I am aware also that my speech is often guided by the conscious application of minor grammatical conventions. The fact that the latter are entertained explicitly does not in any way diminish the fact that they exercise a causal role in the syntactical organization of my utterances. Why should it be any different in other cognitive domains, such as ritual action?

When people tell us that they participate in rituals *because* successful harvests or personal salvation depend upon it, why should we disbelieve them? When people tell us that they ceased to perform rituals *because* of a crisis of faith or a loss of belief, why should that not be true? The answer cannot be because the causal efficacy of such beliefs is untestable. The theory of modes of religiosity proposes the following falsifiable prediction: *any religious tradition composed entirely of rituals for which no religious justifications are thought to exist will rapidly become extinct*. Boyer's contamination-avoidance theory would predict the reverse. I think the weight of evidence from both ethnography and historiography supports my hypothesis over his. But I admit that we need much more data before we can reach confident conclusions on this matter.

Boyer's final point is that revelations (and cultural knowledge more generally) are not valued because of their contributions to social cohesion and identity. He points, for instance, to the fact that people readily learn local dialects without intending to establish localized social bonds (Boyer, p 10). My response to this has two aspects. On the one hand, I can certainly recall making a considerable effort to learn and adopt the dialectal norms of my peers at the widely differing schools I attended in childhood. And my more recent experience of living in Belfast, and observing the conscious efforts made by those around me to accentuate and display their religious and political allegiances, has helped to persuade me that the high value placed on certain cultural markers can have everything to do with their identity-conferring properties. On the other hand, however, this was not a major plank of my thesis in *Arguments and Icons*. What I was suggesting was that the scale of communal identities and the intensity of social cohesion were outcomes of divergent patterns of transmissive frequency and cognitive processing via differing systems of memory. In this model, social identity and cohesion were treated as consequences rather than causes, even though (once established) those consequences could have further ramifications of their own. For instance, many of the markers of Loyalist identity in Belfast refer in complex ways to highly schematized historical and religious knowledge somewhat patchily transmitted in Protestantism via the more or less routinized practices of the doctrinal mode. But, regardless of what the natives tell you, these referents are not particularly relevant to explaining the special

valence of such identity-markers in Northern Ireland. This valence derives primarily from the imagistic ritual practices of localized Loyalist groups, such as ritualized violence and its psychological consequences for both victims and perpetrators, rites of initiation within paramilitary cells, and so on. In other words, Loyalists in Belfast value their identity markers principally because of their participation in imagistic practices, not the other way around. But, having accorded high value to them, these markers are then quite deliberately used to intimidate enemies, to celebrate in-group solidarity, to legitimate the punishment of defectors, and (yes!) to *motivate* future ritual performances. The relationship between ritual and revelation becomes one of mutual reinforcement but the causes and origins of the motivational states at issue ultimately reside in the way cognition is organized and distributions of cultural markers stabilized through selection.

Like Boyer, Barth has suggested that the motivations driving participation in rituals may not be consciously accessible to the participants themselves. In *Arguments and Icons*, I suggested that the use of Freudian models in attempting to reconstruct such unconscious processes ran against the grain of Barth's (and my own) empiricist instincts. I am less sure of that now, because I have since learned of attempts within psychoanalytic psychology to construct a body of experimental evidence relating to the operations of a dynamic unconscious, formed through deep motivational conflict (Luborsky 1976, 1977, Luborsky and Crits-Christoph 1990, Barber and Crits-Christoph 1993), and I have been persuaded of the potential relevance of these findings for our understanding of religion (for a fuller discussion, see Nuckolls 2001 and Whitehouse 2001a). What we do not yet know is whether unconscious motivational conflict has a causal role in the success of all religious traditions or just some, and there is at least some anecdotal evidence that the master-plan of Freudian theories of religion, the Oedipus Complex, may not be applicable cross-culturally (e.g. Strathern 1992). But even if such a complex turns out to be as ubiquitous as Boyer's predisposition to acquire contamination-avoidance measures, we still have to ask whether this is a sufficient motivation for participation in rituals. As it stands, the theory of modes of religiosity predicts that it is not: without explicit revelations, people will drop out (4).

Sjjoblom suggests yet another possible psychological approach to explaining divergent modes of religiosity. Like Boyer and Barth, he suggests that we focus our attention on *unconscious* processing, this time guided by Damasio's (1994) theory of 'somatic markers'. Although not elaborated at length, Sjjoblom's proposal is that explicit recollection of past ritual performances may play a lesser role in subsequent transmission than people's unconscious responses to cues in the unfolding process of ritual performance. These responses, he suggests, are shaped by emotionally-laden intuitions regarding 'how the ritual should be done' as opposed to conscious recall of 'how it was done in the past'.

Sjjoblom raises an interesting point, one that has (as he notes) been developed further in the cognitive study of religion and ritual by Pyysiainen (1996, 2001) (5). Such an approach, it seems to me, has great potential to build upon and extend the general perspective I have been proposing (and vice-versa). The same, as I hope to have made clear, would be true of arguments from evolutionary psychology concerning contamination avoidance (as suggested by Boyer) or from psychoanalytic psychology (as suggested by Barth). But these different approaches are likely to explain different things, and should not (at this stage of development in our knowledge) be seen as rival theories. Just as contamination avoidance might explain some constants in the human disposition towards ritual participation, so theories of a dynamic unconscious or of somatic markers might explain other recurrent aspects of ritual transmission and transformation over time. But none of the above approaches can account for the clustering of divergent suites of variables that the theory of modes of religiosity hopes to explain. Such projects are compatible, not mutually exclusive.

The only review in the current batch that *seems* to advance a conflicting perspective is that of Houseman (although I think the conflict may be more apparent than real). On the face of it, Houseman appears to be suggesting that the causes of divergent modes of religiosity do not lie in what he calls ‘internal, psychological states’, ‘mental operations’, or ‘interior, intra-psychic mechanisms’ (p 18). Rather, the causes lie in ‘relational forms’ (p 19) which, largely by implicit contrast, we are encouraged to suppose are somehow ‘external’ to mentation. Interpreted this way, it seems to me that Houseman’s argument is founded on faulty ontology. Where are social relations to be located if not in the minds of those who entertain and act upon them? But Houseman’s argument may be read another way. His objection might be, not that the causes of modes of religiosity are non-psychological but that the theory (as set out in *Arguments and Icons*) focuses on the *wrong sorts* of psychological causes. Interpreted in that light, Houseman’s argument looks rather more like Boyer’s, Barth’s, and Sjoblom’s. In particular, he suggests that symbolic meanings and revelations may not be terribly important outcomes of ritual, and may not indeed help to motivate subsequent transmission (cf. Boyer’s critique, discussed above). Rather, the cognitions generated by ritual action are principally concerned with the re-ordering of social relations, and these are the schemas that motivate future ritual performances.

I agree that the initiation rituals mentioned by Houseman mark a change in each initiate’s vantage point on the world, and that they often do so by dramatizing and thereby announcing a change in his or her social relations. What is less clear to me is why this outcome should be ‘more important’ than the revelatory knowledge that is typically generated through such rituals. I can, however, think of reasons why the reverse is probably true – that the transformation of social relations is a *less* important aspect of ritualization than the transmission of revelations. The main reason is this: rituals are not necessary for the transformation of social relations, whereas they are essential for the construction of revelatory processes such as those associated, in the imagistic mode, with SER. Graduation ceremonies and puberty rites, for instance, are ways of transforming social relations. Both can be dispensed with, however, without jeopardizing these transformations. Graduates can be sent their certificates in the mail, and children can gradually acquire adult status without this being ritually marked. The reason why rituals are not strictly necessary to effect changes in social relations is that the latter are capable of becoming evident of their own accord, simply through their routinization in everyday life. Rituals can mark such transformations as more sudden and dramatic but the claim that they *effect* such transformations is mere ideology, rather than a natural ‘given’. By contrast, one cannot set in train psychological processes of revelation, of the sort described for instance by Barth in his study of Baktaman initiations, *without* the traumatic ordeals that novices are obliged to endure.

### **Transmissive Frequency: some clarifications**

In *Arguments and Icons*, I proposed that transmissive frequency constituted a crucially important variable affecting the activation of systems of memory, and a range of sociopolitical features consequent upon this. Several of the contributors to this review forum have commented critically on the way this hypotheses was constructed and expressed – most notably McCauley, Barth, Houseman, Malley, and Sjoblom. Many of their comments on this matter are highly instructive and some have important theoretical and/or methodological implications.

R. N. McCauley persuasively identifies the dangers of talking too loosely about transmissive frequency (p 27-8). If we are seeking to ascertain the frequency of a particular ritual, do we mean by that: (a) the



frequency with which it occurs in a particular population (if so, which?); (b) the frequency with which individual worshippers participate (if so, does this vary and is any variation random or is it 'by category of participant'); (c) the frequency of the ritual over a particular time period (if so, what do we do if it is performed ten times in a given month but never again for ten years?); (d) the frequency of rituals performed or rituals observed, or both? These questions (and others are possible) are clearly of paramount importance, and McCauley is right to call me to account for not being more explicit about the relevant measures of frequency.

As regards the activation of those memory systems essential to the crystallization of modes of religiosity, measures of frequency should pertain only to individual participants (not populations, and not mere observers). As far as the activation of 'Flashbulb Memory' (FM) is concerned, it appears to be crucially important that a given traumatic episode is surprising and novel. Long-term repeated exposure to the same ordeals appears to have mnemonic effects very different from those associated with FM (see Terr 1991), and would not be adequate to account for the coalescence of imagistic features. Subsequent involvement in such ordeals, in the role of co-ordinator, helper, or observer (rather than victim) is an entirely different matter (see below). Likewise, when it comes to highly routinized rituals, the frequency measure must be individual participation. Mere observation would not be sufficient to activate the implicit procedural knowledge entailed in the reproduction of frequently-performed rituals. A more passive role is possible when it comes to the learning of explicit ritual scripts, exegesis, doctrine, narratives, and other verbally-articulated religious knowledge. As with all forms of language-based learning, active rehearsal can be a useful means of consolidation but it does not appear to be essential (6). Dutiful listening can be enough. But since the stable reproduction of an orthodoxy depends in part on the SER-suppressing effects of implicit procedural learning, high-frequency ritual *participation* is an essential element of the doctrinal mode (see Whitehouse 2002b and 2002c).

Barth and Houseman make some very valuable observations concerning the relationship between participation and frequency in the imagistic mode. Both point out that the FM-effects of one-off initiatory ordeals may not be sufficient to provide the sorts of recall necessary for the re-enactment of these rituals in the future (Barth, p 15; Houseman, p 20). Rather, they both suggest, it is subsequent and *repeated* involvement in the co-ordination of initiation rites for fresh cohorts of novices that provides the richly schematized knowledge of the ritual process needed for confident orchestration of initiations as experienced elders. On current evidence, this seems a plausible corrective to the argument presented in my book. But if the one-off ordeals of novices in initiations are not sufficient to allow subsequent transmission, why should they be necessary at all? Given my hypothesis that massively elevated negative arousal in one-off ritual ordeals is a reliably recurrent feature of the imagistic mode *in general*, there had better be a good answer to this question.

The problem is not, to be fair, entirely new to me. Indeed, in my most recent publications I have tried to make a start at resolving it (Whitehouse 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). FM, I now suggest, does not provide a sufficient set of reference points to which those responsible for subsequent re-enactments refer (which is not to say it has no importance in that regard). The most critical contribution of FM is rather to generate SER, and thus *motivation*, via subsequent primes and cues in the environment. In some cases, this may take the form of intrusive flashbacks of the sort widely associated with 'post-traumatic stress disorder' (Conway 1995: Chapter Four). In others, recollection may be rather less emotionally intense, as Barth has suggested in his review (p 15). But the act of recall for intrinsically very puzzling episodes provides ample 'food for thought' through years of cautious and tentative contemplation. SER-production may take the form of a

highly retarded process of ‘representational redescription’ (Karmiloff-Smith 1992, Whitehouse 2002b, 2002c). The victim of a ritual ordeal initially recalls only ‘a few vivid but cryptic flashbulb moments’ (Barth, p 15). These recollections are associated, at first, with rather vaguely formulated intuitions about the possible symbolic motivations of the ordeals one has endured – much as described in Barth’s (1975) pioneering study of Baktaman initiation. Over time, these partially explicit inferences come to be entertained more confidently and perhaps more elaborately. Future involvement, in the role of ritual co-ordinator or observer, could certainly play an important (perhaps vital) role in this process of representational redescription. Very experienced ritual experts and elders achieve such an advanced stage of SER-production that their exegetical insights are largely available to cross-domain, off-line processing with all the properties that Barth associates with ‘analogic’ codification. The knowledge constructed in such a fashion is not only constitutive of the traditions most valued ‘revelations’ but, I would argue, plays a hugely important role in *motivating* inter-generational transmission. The full case for such a line of interpretation is set out elsewhere (Whitehouse 2002b, 2002c) but I admit we need more data, especially of an experimental kind (7), in order to understand these processes more fully.

If our understanding of production of SER and motivation in the imagistic mode remains incomplete, this may be said also of the way orthodox exegetical knowledge in the doctrinal mode serves to motivate worship (and religious commitment more generally). With regard to the latter, some important questions are raised by Brian Malley. The doctrinal mode, he points out, presents special problems of motivation. The revelatory quality of its teachings may well be especially intense during periods of reformation and spread – when doctrines appear novel and inspirational, problems of religious motivation are kept at bay. But what happens when the same religious teachings have been heard thousands of times, and the content of sermons becomes entirely predictable? Like me, Malley recognizes the potential for *tedium*, in conditions of religious routinization (p 6):

The tendency, in discussions of religion, has been to emphasize the sacredness, profundity, passion, ecstasy, and danger of religious experience. To be sure, such sentiments are important. Yet in fact the experience of practising religion is more often dull, boring, or even irritating. (It is not without reason that the ‘world’ religions have some notion that discipline is required.) Rather than neglecting such sentiments as somehow non-genuine or spurious, Whitehouse suggests that the tedium of the doctrinal mode is an inherent destabilizing factor, creating openings for more exciting splinter movements and requiring constant investment for the preservation of doctrine.

If tedium is a predictable outcome of excessive routinization, the ‘Achilles heel’ of the doctrinal mode wherever we may find it, then how do we account for the long-term success of certain very ‘pure’ examples of the doctrinal mode in American Protestant Christianity? In short: ‘why doesn’t the tedium effect take hold?’ (Malley, p7). Malley supplies a plausible answer to the question.

Repetition, Malley suggests, can have the effect of increasing the relevance of religious teachings in people’s lives. The teachings themselves may be thoroughly familiar but their continual reiteration, in proper ways, allows endlessly novel applications of this knowledge to the ever-shifting contexts of daily experience. In other words, as suggested in *Arguments and Icons*, the doctrinal mode can evolve in such a way that its techniques of persuasion have enduring motivational force. Of these techniques, I suggested that rhetorical, dialogic discursive practices are particularly important (e.g. 2000: 93-4). Styles of sermonizing that ‘draw the congregation in’ to a kind of conversation founded around questions and answers provides a template for

the interpretation of seemingly all aspects of daily life. The template used in the pulpit can be used also in the shopping mall, the work place, and the living room. This is at least one aspect, I think, of the ‘relevance’ of some forms of Christian teaching that Malley is referring to. But like all forms of evolution, this one operates on principles of selection. Persuasive forms of rhetoric did not become widespread in certain American Protestant churches simply because they had exceptionally talented preachers. Rather, countless acts of experimentation happened to lead cumulatively to the techniques we can now observe (and which have since spread to many other parts of the world). Meanwhile, other forms of Protestantism, as found for instance in the Church of England, have unwittingly developed less successful forms of codification and transmission. The lesson appears to be that it is not only the *novelty* of the message that motivates participation in the doctrinal mode, but also the extent of its *relevance* and *applicability* in everyday life. Again, however, we need more empirical information on patterns of religious involvement and spread in the doctrinal mode, and the psychological mechanisms driving them.

Sjoblom, by contrast, presents the frequency hypothesis with a problem, which, if valid, would be much more serious than those addressed above. He focuses his discussion on four kinds of Finnish celebrations, associated respectively with Christmas, Easter, the start of the New Year, and the marking of midsummer. According to Sjoblom, the first two (Christmas and Easter) are constitutive of a doctrinal mode of religiosity; the second two (New Year and midsummer celebrations) sustain an imagistic mode of religiosity. The problem is this: all the above celebrations have the same frequency (all occurring annually), calling into question my hypothesis that variations in frequency are *necessarily* implicated in the activation of alternative systems of memory, which in turn drive selection of the two modes of religiosity. To challenge the frequency hypothesis is to strike at the very heart of my theory.

If Sjoblom’s cases really present the kind of problem he suggests, then they must do so in relation to the theory I am actually advancing and not some other. The crunch question is whether the various celebrations considered by Sjoblom are constitutive of modes of religiosity in the way he suggests. There are several reasons to suppose that they are not (although the information provided to Sjoblom is insufficient to say with any certainty).

To begin with the Christmas and Easter celebrations, it should be emphasized that these are probably *part* of the doctrinal mode rather than being constitutive of it. In order for any Christian tradition to be preserved in a recognizable form, it must successfully transmit certain teachings and liturgical rites on a basis *much more frequent than once-a-year*. The intricate and extensive bodies of knowledge that make Christmas and Easter specifically Christian celebrations (rather than, as for many of us, merely pseudo-religious holidays), derive from very frequently-rehearsed beliefs and practices. Even the most infrequent (8) rites of Christianity (e.g. weddings, baptisms, and funerals) are cannibalized from weekly liturgy (cf. McCauley 2001). Thus, celebrations of Christmas and Easter in Finland (or anywhere else) do not provide evidence of a doctrinal mode of religiosity, founded upon forms of ideological and ritual transmission with a frequency of once-a-year. Insofar as these are distinctively religious occasions, they are based on forms of transmission with a very much higher frequency than that.

New Year and midsummer celebrations present a different set of problems. Above all, it is not clear to me why these should be constitutive of an imagistic mode of religiosity. In order for that to be the case, it would be necessary to show: (a) that these activities generate widely different FM-effects and (b) that the FM-effects drive processes of SER that motivate subsequent transmission. With regard to (a), I suspect that these annual celebrations unfold in ways that accord with substantially schematized knowledge available in

semantic memory. Elements of particular celebrations that are recalled episodically (and thus survive the effects of alcohol-induced amnesia!) are probably not of the FM-type. More importantly, with regard to (b), there may be no special religious valence attached to details encoded episodically. Why? Because it is likely to be only the non-ritualized, technically-motivated occurrences that survive in episodic memory (e.g. 'hilarious' and/or titillating drunken escapades). By contrast, ritualized aspects of the event, conforming as they do to schemas in semantic memory, are less likely to be recalled in the long run as distinct episodic moments. Since I have never been to Finland on New Year's Eve, and unfortunately just missed the midsummer celebrations on my first visit to the country, I cannot attest to any of this with confidence. But, on the strength of my limited knowledge, I suspect that midsummer celebrations resemble rather more closely the 'turning of the Minister's back' in Lutheran church services, than the revelatory acts of Baktaman initiation. Midsummer celebrations, Sjoblom tells us, once had a widely-known, verbally-transmitted exegesis, which people no longer recall. These annual parties, however, are unlikely to generate SER of the sort that prevails in the imagistic mode of religiosity. Again, this is a matter that could only be resolved through systematic empirical investigations.

### **Testing and Applying the Theory**

The key predictions of the theory of modes of religiosity can be broken down into twelve basic scenarios for religious transmission which can only have four kinds of outcomes: doctrinal effects, imagistic effects, survival without doctrinal or imagistic effects, and extinction of the practices in question. Justin Barrett, a psychologist at the University of Michigan (9), has summarized these key predictions in the form of a series of flow-charts (Fig. 1). The predictions represented here are essentially those advanced in *Arguments and Icons* but Barrett's mode of presentation is very much more concise. The starting point, with regard to each set of predictions, is the combination of arousal level (high/low) and modality of codification (doctrinal/non-doctrinal), allowing four possible combinations (low arousal/doctrinal, low arousal/non-doctrinal; high arousal/doctrinal; high arousal/non-doctrinal). The consequences of any one combination depend upon transmissive frequency (high/low). The resulting eight scenarios have distinctive implications for the processing of religious and ritual knowledge in *memory*, and for the *motivation* of future participation via alternative modalities of revelation. This produces at least five scenarios that should lead to the non-selection/extinction of religious and ritual practices:

- (i) low arousal/doctrinal practices, with low-frequency transmission and no external mnemonics (e.g. written guidance, visual representations, electronic recordings, compositionality (10), etc.) to support them;
- (ii) low arousal/non-doctrinal practices, with high-frequency transmission (see the prediction presented above, *contra* Boyer);
- (iii) low arousal/non-doctrinal practices, with low-frequency transmission (*ditto*);
- (iv) high arousal/doctrinal practices, with high-frequency transmission but poor encoding of verbal material (due to elevated arousal);
- (v) high arousal/non-doctrinal practices, with high frequency transmission.

What would count as a refutation of my model would be clear ethnographic or historiographical evidence of the survival of religious traditions founded exclusively or primarily on *any* of the above scenarios. Likewise, we need evidence to support or challenge those predictions (in Fig. 1) that relate, more positively, to the production of both doctrinal and imagistic effects. In light of the data I have so far encountered, I am tentatively optimistic that the modes of religiosity theory might (one day) be verified, perhaps in a modified or refined form.

Martin's review highlights both the challenges and potential rewards of empirical verification. One challenge is to find out whether the predictions summarized in Fig. 1 are supported by what we already know, or can find out, about religions everywhere. Martin recognizes that this challenge is laid, in the first instance, on the doorstep of social and cultural anthropology, as the main repository of *detailed* knowledge of religious variation. Martin argues, however, that an ethnographically well-substantiated version of my theory might have considerable benefits for the construction of historiographical knowledge (pp 31-2). We stand to gain from an opportunity to 'fill in the gaps' of our understanding of religions long since abandoned or transformed. Martin's recent use of the theory of modes of religiosity to explain the remarkable success of early Christianity is exemplary in this regard (Martin *forthcoming*).

In view of the above, I must confess to being a little disappointed by Trompf's contribution to the review forum, which seems neither to characterize my hypotheses accurately, nor to respond to them in any systematic way. Trompf's considerable knowledge of Melanesian religions (which is at least partly ethnographically-based) has been acquired over several decades and might even be described as 'encyclopaedic' (Trompf, p 41). As such, it is of a sort that *could* be immensely valuable to us. But in that case it would have to be used to respond to specific hypotheses rather than to impressionistic feelings about them. Trompf's lament, 'ah, the complexities of Melanesia', challenges us (well, it challenges me) to ask how we might carve up that complexity at the joints, rather than merely to bask in awe of it.

'Pure' examples of modes of religiosity will be hard to find. This was brought home to me, even as the idea of 'modes' first began to crystallize in my mind, through the experience of carrying out detailed ethnographic research on a single religious tradition in Papua New Guinea (Whitehouse 1995). In writing up that material, I was acutely aware of the difficulties of balancing the model against the complexity of social life 'on the ground'. It was obvious, for instance, that 'imagistic' phenomena were not outcomes *simply* of episodic recall for low-frequency, high-arousal rituals; nor was the doctrinal mode, coalescing around more or less routinized religious activities, founded *exclusively* on highly schematized procedural and propositional knowledge. Sociopolitical variables were, if anything, even harder to pin down, and much of my ethnography was preoccupied with the extraordinary complexity and flux of communal identities and of relations of power, authority, and influence (see also Whitehouse 1996). In consequence, the modes story turned out to contain many digressions and sub-plots. The reason this did not put me off, however, was that the modes story still seemed to me the *main* plot, in explaining religious transmission, and it was only in relation to this that the other bits of the story could be recognized as relatively *peripheral* details and embellishments. Thus, the theory provided a sense of scale and structure, impelling me deeper into the ethnography as well as forcing me to develop some generalizing ambitions.

The two modes are nothing more than basins of attraction around which certain patterns of codification, transmission, and political association tend to coalesce. But degrees of coalescence might vary quite dramatically across space and time, exacerbated by temporary, historically contingent factors, such as droughts, famines, disease, genocide, invasion, and so on. A crucial question for my theory is whether

massive interferences in the coalescence of modes are indeed only ever temporary, such that they are counteracted in the long run by the underlying psychological constraints proposed by the model. Despite storms and tempests, does the tide always tend to carry our variables back to their respective attractor positions? To test this out really requires a broad canvas, depicting long-term patterns of variation across wide regions, and taking into account entire traditions (rather than bits and pieces of one, or of several ones). *Arguments and Icons* tried to initiate such a project, for the region of Melanesia, but it was only a limited start.

As should now be clear, I believe the way forward is through inter-disciplinary collaboration. Thanks to a major grant from the British Academy, three specialist research teams in the fields of anthropology, history/archaeology, and cognitive science have now been assembled (11), with the aim of testing the theory of modes of religiosity to the limit. From humble beginnings, and thanks to a mushrooming of interest in the project that none of us anticipated, we now have over sixty scholars contributing data and ideas to this enterprise. Numerous collaborative publications are expected to follow. If *Arguments and Icons* was a useful first step in this process it will, I hope, prove to be just one of many.

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### Endnotes

1. Particularly well-known examples include Durkheim's (1962) functionalism, which rejects psychological explanations of 'social facts', and Geertz's (1973) interpretativism, which postulates a notion of culture as 'public' (external to the mind).

2. Hutchins' (1995) work on 'distributed cognition' currently constitutes the most thoroughgoing examination of such processes.

3. A classic review may be found in Lewis 1980: Chapter Two.

4. Before moving on, two points may be noted. First, Barth may not be suggesting that a Freudian unconscious provides either necessary or sufficient motivations to participate in rituals. His original publications merely suggest that such mechanisms as primary association, displacement, condensation, etc. may be implicated in patterns of ritual innovation. Second, the postulation of a dynamic unconscious plays only a minor role in Barth contribution to this forum and in his work more generally. This is one of the few areas in which I have (rightly or wrongly) expressed criticisms of his approach, to which he has now responded. His more substantial counter-critique is addressed below.

5. Pyysiainen's (1996: 81) main argument, in this connection, is that extrovertive mystical experience 'closely resembles or is even

identical with' what Sjoblom here describes as 'flow'.

6. For a striking example of this, see my description of the possession of a young girl in Papua New Guinea who, despite no prior experience as a religious teacher, showed remarkable skill as an orator when the ancestors spoke 'though' her (Whitehouse 1995: 146-8).

7. For a discussion of some preliminary attempts to gather relevant experimental data, see Whitehouse 2002a.

8. Frequency, as noted above, means 'per individual participant'. Clearly, Christian rites of passage may be frequent events for priests and ministers but for most lay participants they are relatively infrequent.

9. Unlike most cognitive and developmental psychologists, Barrett takes seriously the study of cognitive foundations of religious transmission, and has conducted a number of pioneering experimental studies of the way concepts of extranatural agency are processed at an intuitive/implicit level (see in particular Barrett and Keil 1996, Barrett 2000, and Barrett and Lawson 2001).

10. Compositionality, or what McCauley (2001: 138) has called (by analogy with natural language) a 'compositional hierarchy of ritual', refers to the embedding of comparatively simple rituals in a more complex and elaborate ritual process. Thus, it sometimes happens that a major ritual, which is performed quite rarely, is largely composed of a set of shorter rituals that are performed much more frequently, thus obviating the need for written guidelines to support transmission.

11. Under the auspices of the British Academy Networks Project, three conferences will be held in the following areas: anthropology (Cambridge University, 2001), archaeology/history of religion (University of Vermont, 2002), and cognitive science (Emory University, 2003). The leaders of the research teams form a steering committee for the project, which first met in December 2000 at the Queen's University of Belfast, to finalize plans for the implementation of the research. Interim meetings of the steering committee are also being funded by the Templeton Foundation, as part of the International Culture and Cognition Program at the University of Michigan.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Harvey Whitehouse carried out two years of ethnographic field research in East New Britain, Papua New Guinea from 1987 to 1989, as a doctoral student at the University of Cambridge. From 1990 to 1993 he was a Research Fellow and Director of Studies in Archaeology and Anthropology at Trinity Hall Cambridge. Since 1994, he has taught at the Queen's University of Belfast, where he is currently Reader in Social Anthropology.

