Strangers Abroad: Evans-Pritchard

Anthropology being taught in his day was much like a science. In other words, that the society and its institutions [remember those from the first day?] were organically creating the culture in spite of individuals.

E-P thought instead to look at how people were thinking and acting as individuals and groups in spite of their societies.

He thought it was a mistake to think that the thinking of so-called ‘primitive’ tribes as wrong or because they were not ‘thinking straight.’

“According to Evans-Pritchard, witchcraft beliefs enable people to feel that their misfortunes are not due to their own ignorance, incompetence, or bad luck but are due to people who can be identified and then influenced. Since the accused witch is someone who is perceived to exhibit antisocial behavior, the witchcraft beliefs function to uphold the moral standards of Azande society. Evans-Pritchard argues that Lévy-Bruhl's argument that indigenous people exhibit a "pre-logical" mentality was mistaken. Evans-Pritchard also argues that Azande thought integrated mystical and natural conceptions of causation.”

[http://hirr.hartsem.edu/ency/evans.htm]

E-P went to Africa because English colonization was in its heyday. E-P did not much care for the administrators that he met and had to work for [and in spite of].

Sudan: Southern regions and the Nile Basin. He chose the Azande in 1926. He was the first early British anthropologists to do formal fieldwork in Africa. His book from that trip is:

1937 *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*. Oxford University Press.

Later in his career, he worked in Africa with the Nuer.

“*Nuer Religion* (Clarendon 1956) fully represents the interpretive approach that Evans-Pritchard's work took in the latter part of his academic career. Evans-Pritchard maintains that religious ideas are sui generis and that the essence of Nuer religion cannot be understood by reference to the functions it performs in relation to larger society. He critiques writers such as Radcliffe-Brown and Durkheim who regarded religion as illusion and whose theories attempted to account for this illusion.” [http://hirr.hartsem.edu/ency/evans.htm]

Here is a good description of E-P’s career and theoretical thinking:

<http://spruce.flint.umich.edu/~simoncu/269/pritchard.htm>