In few societies of the world does witchcraft assume a more focal interest than among the Azande, a large and complex group situated

It is an inevitable conclusion from Zande descriptions of witchcraft that it is not an objective reality. The physiological condition which is said to be the seat of witchcraft, and which I believe to be simply a state of mind, is not an objective condition, but the qualities they attribute to it and the reasons they give about it are mythical. Witches, as Zande conceive them, cannot exist.

The concept of witchcraft nevertheless provides them with a natural philosophy by which they can impose on men and unfortunate events a rational and emotionally meaningful reality. Witchcraft, as is already more than a system of values which regulate human conduct.

Witchcraft is ubiquitous. It plays its part in every activity of Zande life: in agricultural, fishing, and hunting, in domestic and social life, in the life of the household as well as in communal life of district and court; it is an important theme of mental life in which it forms both the background of a vast panorama of values and magic; its influence is plainly stamped, on law and morals, etiquette and religion; it is prominent in technology and language; there is no niche of Zande culture into which it does not twist itself. If blight as a result of some kind of crop it is witchcraft: if the bush is vainly scored for game it is witchcraft; if women in their hair are taken to school and are rewarded by but a few small fish it is witchcraft; if armies do not rise when their commander is due and a cold useless night is spent in waiting for their flight it is witchcraft; if a wife is unkind and insipid to her husband it is witchcraft; if a prince is cold and distant with his subject it is witchcraft; if it is magical art to fail to achieve its purpose it is witchcraft; if, in fact, any failure or misfortune falls upon one at any time and in relation to any of the manifold activities of his life it may be due to witchcraft. Those acquainted either at firsthand or through reading with the life of an African people will realize that there is no end to possible misfortunes in routine tasks and leisure hours alike, arising not only from
triscalulation, incompetence and laziness, but also from causes over which the African, with his meager scientific knowledge, has no control. The Zande attributes all these misfortunes to witchcraft unless there is strong evidence, and subsequent oracular confirm-

ation, that society or one of those evil agents which I mentioned in the preceding section has been at work, or until they are clearly to be attributed to incompetence, breach of a taboo, or failure to observe a moral rule.

When a Zande speaks of witchcraft he does not speak of it as we speak of the weird witchcraft of our own history. Witchcraft is to him a commonplace happening and he sel-
dom passes a day without mentioning it. Where we talk about the crops, hunting, and our neighbors' ailments the Zande intro-
duces into these topics of conversation the subject of witchcraft. To say that witchcraft has blighted the groundnut crop, that witch-
craft has scared away game, and that witch-
craft has made so-and-so ill is equivalent to saying in terms of our own culture that the groundnut crop has failed owing to blight that game is scarce this season, and that so-
and-so has caught influenza. Witchcraft par-
ticipates in all misfortunes and is the idiom in which Azande speak about them and in which they explain them. Witchcraft is a classification of misfortunes which while dif-
ferring from each other in other respects have this single character: this is harmful-
ness to man.

Unless the reader appreciates that witch-
craft is quite a normal factor in the life of Azande, one to which almost any and every happening may be referred, he will not understand their behavior towards it. To us witchcraft is something which haunted and disgusted our credulous forefathers. For the Zande expect to come across witchcraft at any time of the day or night. He would be just as surprised if he were not to come into daily contact with it as we would be if con-
fronted by its appearance. To him there is nothing miraculous about it. It is expected that a man's hunting will be injured by witches, and he has at his disposal means of dealing with them. When misfortunes occur he does not become awe-struck at the play of supernatural forces. He is not terrified at the presence of an occult enemy. He is, on the other hand, extremely annoyed. Some one, out of spite, has hindered his groundnut by spoiling his hunting or given his wife a chill, and surely this is cause for anger! He has done no one harm, so what right has anyone to interfere in his affairs? It is an imperti-
nence, an insult, a dirty, offensive trick. It is the aggressiveness and not the fearlessness of these actions which Azande emphasize when speaking of them, and it is anger and not awe which we observe in their response. These actions which Azande emphasize when speaking of them, and it is anger and not awe which we observe in their response. Witchcraft is not less anticipated than adultery. It is so interwoven with everyday happenings that it is part of a Zande's ordi-

nary world. There is nothing remarkable about a woman—she may be one yourself, and certainly many of your closest neighbors are witches. Nor is there anything awe-inspiring about witchcraft, We do not become psycho-
logically transformed when we hear that someone is ill—we expect people to be ill—
and it is the same with Azande. They expect people to be ill, i.e., to be bewitched, and it is not a matter for surprise or wonderment.

But is not Azande belief in witchcraft a belief in mystical causation of phenomena and events to the complete exclusion of all natural causes? The relations of mystical to commonsense thought are very complicated and raise problems that confront us on every page of this book. Here I wish to state the problem in a preliminary manner and in terms of actual situations.

I found it strange at first to live among Azande and listen to naive explanations of misfortunes which, to our minds, have ap-
parent causes, but after a while I learned the idiom of their thought and applied notions of witchcraft as spontaneously as themselves in situations where the concept is relevant. A boy knocked his foot against a small stump of wood in the center of a bush path, a frequent happening in Africa, and suffered pain and inconvenience in consequence. Owing to its con-
tact he it was necessary to keep the cut free from dirt and it began to fester. He declared that witchcraft had made him knock his foot against the stump. I argued with Azande and criticized their statements, and I did so on this occasion. I told the boy that he had the power to knock his foot against the stump of wood because he had been careless, and that witchcraft had not placed it in the path, for it had grown there naturally. He agreed that witchcraft had nothing to do with the stump of wood being in his path but added that he had kept his eyes open for stumps, as indeed every Zande does most carefully, and that if he had not been bewitched he would have seen the stump. As a conclusive argument for his view he reminded me that all cuts and sores stay in heal but, on the contrary, close quickly, for that is the nature of cuts. Why, then, had his sore festered and remained open if there were no witchcraft behind it? This, as I
discovered before long, was to be regarded as the Zande explanation of sickness. Thus, to give a still further example, I had been feeling unwell for several days, and I consulted Zande friends whether my consumption of bananas could have had anything to do with my indisposition and I was at once informed that bananas do not cause sickness, however many are eaten unless one is intoxicated. I have described at length Zande notions of disease in Part IV, so I shall record here a few examples of witchcraft being offered as an explanation for happenings other than illness.

Shortly after my arrival in Zandeiland we were passing through a government settlement and noticed that a hut had been burned to the ground on the previous night. Its owner was overcome with grief as it had contained the beer he was preparing for a nuptial feast. He told us that he had gone the previous night to examine his beer. He had lit a handful of straw and raised it above his head so that light would be cast on the pots, and in so doing he had ignited the thatch. He, and my companions also, were convinced that the disaster was caused by witchcraft.

One of my chief informants, Kijanga, was a skilled wood carver, one of the finest carvers in the whole kingdom of Gbadwe. Occasionally the bowls and stools which he carved split during the work, as one may well imagine in such a climate. Though the hardest woods were selected they sometimes split when dry or on freezing. I had been particularly interested in this when I was at home. He attributed the misfortune to witchcraft and used to hang rings on the bows and stools of this particular craftsman he attributed the misfortune to witchcraft and used to hang rings on the bows and stools of this particular craftsman because he thought that he was mistreated by his neighbors. When I used to reply that I thought he was mistaken and that people were well disposed towards him he used to tell me that the split bowl or stool was a concrete evidence of his suspicions. People were not bewitching his work, how would I account for this? Likewise a potter will attribute the cracking of his pots during firing to witchcraft. An experienced potter may have no right that his pots will crack as a result of error. He selects the proper clay, kneads it thoroughly till he has extracted all grit and pebbles, and builds it up slowly and carefully. On the night before digging out his clay he abstains from sexual intercourse. So he should have nothing to fear. Yet pots sometimes break, even when they are the handiwork of expert potters, and this can only be accounted for by witchcraft. "It is broken—hence is witchcraft," says the potter proudly.

Many similar situations in which witchcraft is cited as an agent are detailed throughout this volume and following chapters.

In speaking to Zande about witchcraft and in observing their reactions to situations of misfortune it was obvious that they did not attempt to account for the existence of phenomena, or even the action of phenomena, by mystical doctrine alone. What they explained by witchcraft were the particular conditions in a chain of causation which related an individual to natural happenings in such a way that he sustained injury. The boy who knocked his foot against a stump of wood did not account for the stump by reference to witchcraft, nor did he suggest that whenever anybody knocks his foot against a stump it is necessarily due to witchcraft, nor yet again did he account for the cut by saying that it was caused by witchcraft, for he knew quite well that it was caused by the stump of wood. What he attributed to witchcraft was that on this particular occasion, when exercising his usual care, he struck his foot against a stump of wood, whereas on a hundred other occasions he did not do so, and that on that particular occasion the cut, which he expected to result from the knock, appeared whereas he had had dozens of cuts which had not occurred. Surely these peculiar circumstances are due to witchcraft.

Again, if one eats a number of bananas this does not of itself cause sickness. Why should it? It is possible that one may have eaten too much; but the sick person will not lack sickness in consequence, and I myself had often done so in the past. Therefore my interpretation would be that he attributed his sickness to witchcraft. If bananas alone had caused my sickness then it was necessary to account for the fact that I was sick on this single occasion and not on dozens of previous occasions, and that they had made only one ill and not other people who were eating them. Again, every hundred or so nights he might expect his pot to break by beer by night and they always take with them a handful of straw in order to illuminate the hut in which he is fermenting. Why then should this particular night on this single occasion have spoiled the tush of his beer? I present the Zande’s explicit line of reasoning—"not my own." Again, my friend the wood carver had made scores of bowls and stools without mishap and he knew all there was to know about the selection of wood, use of tools, and conditions of carving. His bowls and stools did not split like the products of craftsmen who were unskilled in their work,
so why on rare occasions should his bows and stools split when they did not split usual-
ly and when he had exercised all his usual knowledge and care? He knew the answer well enough and so, in his opinion, did his envious, backbiting neighbors. In the same way, a potter wants to know why his pots should break on an occasion when he uses the same material and technique as on other occasions: or rather he already knows for the reason is known in advance as it were. If the pots break it is due to witchcraft.

We must understand, therefore, that we shall give a false account of Zande philos- ophy if we say that they believe witchcraft to be the sole cause of phenomena. This propo-
sition is not contained in Zande patterns of thought, which only assert that witchcraft brings a man into relation with events in such a way that he sustains injury.

My old friend Ongesi was many years ago injured by an elephant while out hunting, and his prince, Basengoda, consulted the oracles to discover who had bewitched him. We must distinguish here between the ele-
phant and its prowess, on the one hand, and the fact that a particular elephant injured a particular man, on the other hand. The Su-
preme Being, not witchcraft, created ele-
phants and gave them tusks and a trunk and huge legs so that they are able to pierce men and fling them sky high and reduce them to piles of bloody bones. Why, then, should this particular man on this one occa-
sion in a life crowded with similar situations in which his friends and enemies other-
less have been gored by this particular beast? Why he and not someone else? Why on this occasion and not on other occasions? Why by this elephant and not by other elephants? It is the particular and variable conditions of an event and not the general and universal conditions that witchcraft explains. Fire is hot, but it is not hot owing to witchcraft, for that is its nature. It is a universal quality of fire to burn, but it is not a universal quality of fire to burn you. This may never happen, or once in a lifetime, and then only if you have been bewitched.

In Zandeland sometimes an old granary collapses. There is nothing remarkable in this. Every Zande knows that termites eat the supports in course of time and that even the hardest woods decay after years of service. Now a granary is the summer-house of a Zande village and people sit beneath it in the heat of the day and chat or play the African game of war or work at some craft. Consequently it may happen that there are people sitting beneath the granary when it collapses and they are injured, for it is a heavy structure made of beams and clay and may be stored with eleusine as well. Now why should these particular people have been sitting under this particular granary at the particular moment when it collapsed? That it should collapse is easily intelligible, but why should it have collapsed at the particular moment when these particular people were sitting beneath it? Through years it might have collapsed, so why should it fall just when certain people sought its kindly shelter? We say that the granary col-
lapsed because its supports were eaten away by termites. That is the cause that explains the collapse of the granary. We also say that people were sitting under it at the time because it was in the heat of the day and they thought that it would be a comfortable place to talk and work. This is the cause of people being under the granary at the time it col-
lapsed. To our minds the only relationship between these two events is the coincidence in time and in a certain place, for there is no interdependence between them.

Zande philosophy can supply the missing link. The Zande knows that the supports were eaten away by termites, and that these people were sitting beneath the granary in order to escape the heat and glare of the sun. But he knows besides that these two events occurred at a precisely similar moment in time and space. It was due to the action of witch-
craft. That if there had been no witchcraft people would have been sitting under the granary and it would not have fallen on them, or it would have collapsed but the people would not have been sheltering under it at the time. Witchcraft explains the coincidence of these two happenings.