

“I’M ADULT! AREN’T I!”

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“I’M ADULT! AREN’T I!”



Understanding Juvenile Delinquency
and
Creating Adults out of Children



THE CASE FOR
A FORMAL
RITE OF PASSAGE

Geoffrey Ben-Nathan



RUBIN MASS
JERUSALEM

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For my wife Margaret

and

Russ and the graffiti warriors

PREFACE

The words of this book's title, "I'm Adult! Aren't I!", were the response given by an anonymous adolescent when I asked him why he was smoking. This was way back in 1976 at a chance encounter at a London Probation office.

"I'm Adult! Aren't I!" presents its readers with what I believe is an entirely new perspective on the root cause of most juvenile delinquency and adolescent anti-social behaviour: western society has failed to realise that children need to be matured into adults in a very formal way. If left to chance, results can be, and frequently are, disastrous. What is now urgently needed therefore is a state-supervised programme of socialisation, a state-supervised rite of passage. After decades of no-progress, this is now the only way ahead.

The book argues that anti-social behaviour and juvenile delinquency are children's own impromptu substitutes for rite of passage. They are the ad hoc 'programme' that many children initiate for themselves, in the absence of anything official. Children, these days, seem to be in a head-long rush to gain what they believe to be adult status. This book claims that the objective of ad hoc anti-social behaviour is the attempt, usually unsuccessful, to discard childhood status. If children are going to be successful in their desire, they are going to need formal state help.

"I'm Adult! Aren't I!" asserts that the socialisation of children into young adults is a process equivalent in importance to education itself. Just as there is a Ministry of Education, so there may need to be, ungainly as it sounds, a Ministry of Socialisation. The measures suggested in the book for a contemporary rite of passage for our own society no doubt require such an initiative if they are to be implemented – as would, I believe, almost any other suggestion for a viable rite of passage.

In making the case, readers are introduced to the way socialisation of youths proceeds in highly ritualised societies. Two such societies, the Maasai and the Japanese, are explored in detail. Both mature their youth

very successfully; but they do so in very different ways. They are a reservoir of ideas.

This leads to deeper consideration of ritual and rite of passage; ritual's astonishing power to transform human beings from one status to another; but is, we ask, Western society too sophisticated to embrace ritual and the rite-of-passage phenomenon?

We note the existence of apparently parallel modes of behaviour in the youth of Western and highly ritualised societies: the prevalence of what may be called 'angry young man' syndrome; and how the capricious force we label 'Destiny' seems to be propitiated by youth everywhere. Initiation rituals such as scarification or circumcision without anaesthetic take their toll of injury and death among the youth in some, but not all, highly ritualised societies; whilst in Western society, youth court danger by playing games of 'chicken' – of which drug-taking, joy-riding and the latest fad of tomb-stoning are but a few of many. Even the more positive approach of taking a gap year to travel the world can end up with Destiny's intervention by way of road accident or misadventure.

We examine a fascinating experiment to introduce rite of passage to modern American youngsters. In the final part of the book, we unveil proposals for a contemporary and international rite-of-passage programme for children in Western society. Life-skills, life-experiences and voluntary service at home and abroad make up its content. This programme is always informed by principles derived from the investigation of traditional and highly ritualised societies.

If this book has its ultimate influence, it will be instrumental in re-directing the course by which children in Western society are raised and transformed into adults. In the first instance though, it may be judged a success if it does no more than convince the Establishment that the real source of our current woes with young people derives from the absence of formal rite of passage. For too long we have talked about the causes of crime without knowing what they really are; worse, for too long innocent young lives have been blighted, victims of forces of whose existence they are unaware and whose power they cannot control.

The book makes it abundantly clear that successful rite of passage cannot be introduced 'tomorrow morning'. Any rite-of-passage proposal, including the one put forward in this book, requires changes to law. In making the necessary proposals, one hears a chorus of 'you *can't* do this, you'll *never* get that through'. Theory is one thing, practice quite another. If rite of passage is traumatising for young people, it may be even more so for the society that attempts to put it into practice! This is a problem one just has to face. As they say: 'No pain, no gain'.

PREFACE

Having said all this, I know in my bones that formal transition, rite of passage, is the right, indeed, as I have said, the *only* way to proceed. It alone offers the necessary transformation: and so, for many youngsters this will be a transformation from despair to hope; from overgrown child to confident young adult; from incarcerated young offender to valued young citizen; from liability to asset; and, trite as it may sound, from zero to hero.

Geoffrey Ben-Nathan
Jerusalem, June 2008

FOREWORD

'IM ADOL' ANAI?'

There were just the two of us. I was in my mid-thirties; he was 15, if that. We were waiting – for differing reasons, I imagine – for the local probation officer to return from lunch. It was a hot summer afternoon in 1976. There was nothing to do but to chat or ignore each other, so I embarked on idle small-talk. After a minute or two, I focused on his cigarette which, clearly, I was meant to. He brandished it between his thin bony fingers, controlling it with considerable dexterity.

'So you're into smoking then,' I said, nonchalantly stating the obvious.

'Well, I'm *adol'* anai?'

'Sorry?' I couldn't make any sense of the garbled syllables.

'I'm *adol'* anai?'

Ah! Got it! 'I'm-adult-aren't-I.' That was what the boy was saying.

'Oh yes, of course,' I replied, meaning how stupid of me. I had repaired my momentary lapse. Once again, we were two adults killing time together.

Our man returned from lunch. The young boy went in. I waited my turn.

I pondered his words: 'I'm *adol'* anai?'

This poor pathetic little chap wasn't adult. He was anything but. And yet he sought to convey that he was. He was possessed of an overwhelming desire to 'grow up', or, if not to grow up, to put as much clear blue water as he could between childhood and his current adolescence.

I then had a moment of certainty. I was sure more than ever before of two things: first, antisocial behaviour, juvenile delinquency, call it what you will, is a status-transition problem; and secondly, as a status-transition problem, the solution to it would come from the field of anthropology where the question of status-transition has been most thoroughly investigated.

Rightly or wrongly, I felt I had a special role to play. Given time, I felt, I’d hopefully be able to make a special – perhaps even a decisive – contribution. Why?

A piece of background.

BACKGROUND

My father died in May 1962 when I was 17. I had left school early at the age of 16 to look after his business. There was no smooth passage from school to university. My would-be university years, from 18 to 21, were spent in Islington running an electrical shop. It was hard but enjoyable.

Circumstances changed. At 22, a university career became possible. I entered London University’s School of Oriental and African Studies to read for an Honours Degree in African Studies. The degree comprised three elements: Anthropology (the study of ‘other’ cultures); the study of a language spoken in Africa (I chose Amharic, the principal language of Ethiopia); and Linguistics, the social science that investigates the sounds, grammar and syntax of language the world over.

The course was phenomenal. My teachers were almost all published world authorities. I felt privileged. I *was* privileged. I still feel privileged. It was a first-class arts education.

There was only one problem – me! I spent my time at university enjoying myself. There were parties and politics. I got myself elected as vice-president of the students’ union; I spent the last two years of the course courting. Somehow or other, you know how it is, study was always put off. How could I complain when I emerged in 1968 with a rather poor third-class degree.

Shortly after we married in 1970, a couple of years after my university studies had concluded, my wife Margaret came home with a book from our local W.H. Smiths. It was a hardback that had been remaindered – not a promising endorsement. I don’t know why she thought I’d like it; maybe it was the design on its dust cover: a hat stand, an umbrella *in* the hat stand, civil servant’s bowler *on* it – and a spear *next* to it.

THE COMPANY SAVAGE

I was immediately put off by the title, *The Company Savage – Life in the Corporate Jungle*. I didn’t like the word ‘savage’. In a book whose theme is cultural equivalence, the word is unhelpful. To me, the use of the word ‘savage’ in the title undermined the very thesis that the book so successfully affirms – that so-called ‘savages’ are everything but. But I didn’t write the book, Martin Page did; and no-one seems to have created a fuss. Quite the contrary, the title is very popular.

I read *The Company Savage* from cover to cover and found it a revelation. The book is, as stated, about cultural equivalence, and is a manual of business and social management technique. Boss, staff, wife, kids and mother-in-law problems, it tells us, assail Stock Exchange Man and Stone Age Man alike. It matters little if you live in New York or New Guinea. In both locations human beings require techniques for managing their problems. Page analyses these techniques and sometimes finds modern man copying his tribal counterpart without realising it. Furthermore, he suggests that often, when modern man is *not* following in the footsteps of his tribal counterpart, he ought to be doing so. Look hard, and you'll find great sophistication in highly ritualised societies. Indeed, having analysed their conduct, Page exposes the presence of tribal business and social syndromes so deeply embedded in our own culture that we don't recognise them: we often can't see the wood for the trees.

The book created a huge impression. Single-handedly, so-to-speak, it brought alive four long years of dry and academic university study. In doing so it opened my mind and gave relevance to what had hitherto been entirely scholastic and somewhat sterile. In the next section I discuss Page's book in more detail, given that its influence upon me – and upon the present book – has been formative.

The Company Savage is very funny and highly readable. Page claims to create a 'new' science which he calls Tribology. (This, by the way, makes *two* sciences of the same name.^{1*}) Page's science is dedicated, he says, to showing that 'the jargon and the practices of our business world are synthetic imitations of tribal customs perfected by centuries of trial and error'.

To give you an idea, I quote from the book's dust-cover blurb (with each technique's definition explained after it as per the book's 'Glossary of Tribological Terms'):

Here in *The Company Savage*, the business executive will learn the meaning of:

- ◆ The Lugbur Curse (a technique probably devised by the elders of the Lugbur tribe of Uganda to suppress over-ambitious subordinates, now used in business),
- ◆ The Rajah' Trap (a device believed to be the invention of an Indian ruler who, by encouraging over-specialising in his immediate subordinates, removed and excluded potential challengers from positions from which they could make a plausible bid for

¹ The original meaning of Tribology was 'the study of friction, wear, lubrication, and the design of bearings: the science of interacting surfaces in relative motion' (Oxford Concise Dictionary).

power. Now (1976) found in the electronics and other technologically advanced industries),

- ◆ The Mambwe Dodge (a technique of concealing one’s true wealth from others, particularly one’s nearest and dearest, by appearing to be constantly in debt),
- ◆ The Horomoron Paradox (the paradox that the more one earns, the smaller becomes that proportion of one’s salary one is allowed to spend),
- ◆ The Yam Factor (1. Positive Function (YF-PF): A force which ensures that wives gain more benefit from their husband’s incomes than their husbands do. 2. Negative Function (YF-NF): A force that creates a boomerang effect on people who seek to gain prestige by buying prestige symbols),
- ◆ The Uttar Pradesh Effect (the process by which profit-obsessed *Contract Teams* normally decline into bankruptcy).

If he is a shrewd operator he will be wise to study and digest:

- ◆ The Law of Executive Insolvency.

And finally he will come to look upon his Tax Inspector in an entirely new light.

All in all, Page deduces and defines over sixty business and social syndromes. For me, Page restored the *anthropos* (Greek for mankind) to anthropology. He makes anthropology universal – the study of ‘all’ of mankind. In my university course, I never felt that it had been. Tacitly, there had been ‘them’ and ‘us’. Study of ‘them’ was anthropology; study of ‘us’ – man in ‘developed’ society – was separately defined. That was sociology.

Secondly, Page exploded another tacit assumption: that we have a lot to learn *about* highly ritualised societies but nothing to learn *from* them and that, on the contrary, they have everything to learn from us; insofar as we spend time learning about their cultures, it’s mainly to enable us to smooth their path towards us.

Those words quoted above, ‘tribal customs perfected by centuries of trial and error’ are words which resonate with me. Such customs command respect. They demand investigation. What are they? Are there more?

IN PRAISE OF PAGE

The Company Savage, is unique. In this book, we learn there is much to learn *from* highly ritualised societies. Their ways and our ways are capable of being united. The book is a wonderful example of ‘applied anthropology’. By comparing tribal and modern experiences, Page has provided powerful insight into some of the deepest motivations in human nature. So far as I know, the book is not, nor ever has been, on undergraduate reading lists, which is a great pity!

I was a businessman, and Page’s book became my business bible. It still is. I contacted Page and we met on several occasions. I pronounced myself his devoted disciple only to find I was second in line. One Christopher Frank Kearton (d. 1992), Lord Kearton of Whitchurch, OBE, FRS, had got there first. Courtaulds, Hill Samuel and the British National Oil Corporation were prodigiously successful under his leadership. Can there be any doubt that all this success was founded upon Lord Kearton’s knowledge and application of the principles of Tribology?

The obituary of Martin Page (1938–2003) appeared in *The Times* on 16 September 2003. He was eminently well qualified to write *The Company Savage*, having read anthropology at Cambridge. A distinguished journalist who turned author after failing eyesight cut short his newspaper career, he had been Chief Foreign Correspondent in the sixties for Beaverbrook Newspapers in three major locations – Paris, Moscow and Rome. He reported the insurgency in Algeria and the wars in the Congo and Vietnam.

His obituary tells us that *The Company Savage* was a best-seller in Germany and Japan. But this was just one of several books he wrote on many disparate themes. An extremely talented journalist, learned in many fields, Martin Page has been, as you must have gathered by now, a seminal influence on my life and thinking.

TIME FOR ANTHROPOLOGISTS TO GET THEIR HANDS DIRTY

I am not a professional anthropologist and have no career background, nor am I known in any part of the criminological establishment. Yet in this book I have attempted to present the causes of, and a proposed solution to, the problem of juvenile crime. Society craves an answer to this long-standing scourge. The curse of youth antisocial behaviour demands a remedy. Antisocial behaviour blights the life of the young and the culture within which it occurs. If the proper causes of the phenomenon can be identified, society won’t care where the revelation comes from. Moreover, my studies, reading and private research in schools, colleges and young offender institutions have furnished me with a unique perspective.

The view that there is a direct cause and effect between failed status-transition and antisocial behaviour has not, so far as I know, been previously advanced. Nor, too, the idea that highly ritualised societies must be a first port of call for theoretical inspiration; nor, finally, the idea that only a formal rite of passage will help put an end to antisocial behavioural mayhem.

I am not alone in the view that anthropology could have contributed more than it has. Many comments to this effect have come from within the profession. In a UK anthropological journal, Cecil Helman, Professor of Medical Anthropology at Brunel University writes:

Here [the UK] many anthropology departments have regarded 'applied anthropology' as a contradiction in terms, putting the emphasis more on observing than on participating. Applied anthropology was seen as not 'pure' scholarship but rather as contaminated by its close engagement with practical and policy issues. [...] In the years to come it will no longer be enough for most anthropologists to be merely academic voyeurs, analysing the situation from the sidelines. [...] My hope is that in the future different types of professional experience, even if they originate beyond the borders of anthropology, will be increasingly welcomed into the discipline, and encouraged to contribute even further to its development. Such an eclectic approach can only benefit and enrich, anthropology.

'Why Medical Anthropology Matters', *Anthropology Today*, Feb. 2006, pp. 3–4

I can't and don't claim professional experience. But it's good to read of this catholic attitude, which is a welcome call for contribution from all quarters.

MEANWHILE ...

It was about 8:30 am. The phone rang. I answered it. It was my friend Russ. We'd had lunch together a couple of days back.

'I hate to say this,' he said, 'but you're r ... r ... r ... right!'

'Thank you,' I replied. 'But, as a matter of interest, about what?'

'You remember the graffiti kids?'

I remembered the graffiti kids. Russ runs a market stall in an Essex town. At lunch, he told me all about the graffiti kids. They're aged around 12 to 15, decked out in designer gear and they parade around on bicycles. Kudos accrues to the most daredevil – whoever puts his 'tag' in the most dangerous spot. Russ said they were all scrupulously honest. Whenever he gave credit for soft drinks or whatever, they always paid back. It confirmed, he surmised, their perception of adult behaviour.

FOREWORD

'What about the graffiti kids?'

'Well, when we had lunch, you challenged me to call one of them "a child". Well, I did. I found an excuse to start a sentence: Of course, as a child, you ... I never got beyond the "you".'

'What happened?'

'Well, the boy exploded in anger. "*I am not a **child!***" he screamed.'

'And then?'

'Nothing! He pedalled off into the gloom. But don't worry. He and his mates'll be back.'

'Thanks for that, Russ,' I said.

We said our goodbyes and I put the phone down.

Thirty years have elapsed since my encounter at Harrow Probation Office with young 'I'm adol' anai.' In the meanwhile, as you can see, nothing, absolutely nothing, has changed.

INTRODUCTION

A SIMPLE APPROACH TO A COMPLEX PROBLEM

Western societies have wrestled with the problem of juvenile delinquency for decades and even in the last two New Labour governments, one of the main political war cries has been: 'Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime.' But criminologists, politicians, social workers and psychologists have yet to achieve a breakthrough: there is still no real explanation, no viable solution. Ambitiously this book proposes both by considering the reasons behind juvenile delinquency and putting forward recommendations for how to reduce youth crime. The ideas discussed below need to be understood, for if even some of them are accepted and acted upon, the content of children's lives, as well as those of their parents or guardians, will be radically transformed. Simple language, familiar analogy, is therefore vital.

SCALE OF ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR – SETTING THE SCENE

Statistics are a morass into which one can easily sink without trace. Nonetheless they are a necessary evil. They help us focus on priorities. One feels that if the same zeal were applied to solving crime as to keeping statistics on it, crime and anti-social behaviour would be a thing of the past. I have tried in this work not to get bogged down in statistics. But sometimes it is unavoidable.

Back in 1991 *Criminal Statistics for England and Wales*, a publication of the UK Government Statistical Service, stated: '...the amount of crime committed is perhaps **three times** the number of crimes recorded by the police' (1991, p. 22). The number of crimes recorded by the police then was 5,276,000. This indicates a total of 15,828,000 crimes, two-thirds of which were unrecorded.

In the next paragraph, one learns...

“I’M ADULT AREN’T I?”

‘Comparison of the BCS (British Crime Survey 1992) estimates of crimes committed with police recorded crimes reveals that there were:

- **twice** as many **domestic burglaries** committed as recorded;
- **more than twice** as many **bicycle thefts**;
- **three** times as many **thefts from vehicles**;
- **four** times as many **woundings**;
- **seven** times as many offences of **vandalism**; and
- **eight** times as many **robberies and thefts from the person**
(1991, p. 23, bold in original)

And, finally, as if all this were not enough, section 1.20 of the Criminal Statistics provides some, what it calls, ‘general’ statements:

- a) one in three men born in 1953 had been convicted of a serious offence by the age of 30.
- b) Most first convictions occurred at age 17; males first convicted in their early teens were more likely to continue offending than those convicted later.
- c) Relatively few offenders accounted for a large proportion of convictions; nearly two-thirds of convictions to group a) were committed by the 7 per cent with six or more convictions.

Remember, this latter refers to serious offenders committing *serious* offences.

In 1991, the pie chart of 5,276,000 offences recorded by the police was made up as follows:

Violent crime 5% (263,800);
Criminal damage 16% (844,160);
Burglary 23% (1,213,480);
Other theft 24% (1,266,240);
Car crime 28% (1,477,280);
Fraud and forgery 3% (158,280);
Other 1% (52,760).

We now fast-forward fifteen years to the Home Office Statistical Bulletin, *Crime in England and Wales 2006/07*.

Fifteen years later, the total number of crimes recorded by the police in 2006 has increased (slightly) to 5,428,300 (2007, p. 13).

This makes the key point: in fifteen years, not a lot has changed in England and Wales. Things have not progressed; initiatives have not worked. Perhaps the same can be said not just for this period of fifteen years, but for many decades before this.

The multiplier factor is still present: '... more than half of crimes ... are never reported to the police' (2007, p. 25).

There is little point in burdening the reader with the comparable pie chart for 2006: in April 2002, a new National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) was introduced. So, unfortunately, the comparison would not be like with like. For example, violent crime which *was* 5% of the 1991 pie chart has shot up to 19% of the 2006 pie chart under the new title of 'violence against the person'.

It still remains the case that most criminal activity is carried out by people of age 30 and under, much of it by youngsters who are still in their teens, and very often early teens.

But this work is not principally about serious crime. It is primarily concerned with juvenile delinquency and anti-social behaviour. This can range from mild fractiousness to, but only in its worst manifestation, outright criminality as represented by some of the figures above.

ARE THE MANY TO 'SUFFER' FOR THE FEW?

It remains the case that many young people make an effortless transition from childhood to adolescence. They do not get into trouble with the Law. Some may become testy and perhaps a little impossible to live, or be, with. But not all these 'angry young men' and increasingly 'angry young women' get into trouble with the Law.

The question is: do these non-criminal youngsters constitute a majority? And, if they do, should they be 'forced' into a time-consuming rite-of-passage programme, such as this book advocates, for the sake of a minority of miscreants?

There are a number of answers to this question:

- 1) First and foremost, rite of passage is not a punishment. It is a fine process in its own right. One may argue, doubtless everyone will, on the particular pros and cons of this or that rite-of-passage programme; but the principle is right. Our society desperately needs to socialise its young; it desperately needs the innovation of a formal rite of passage.
- 2) I would like to think that the content of the rite-of-passage programme in Part VIII of this book is sufficiently attractive for most young people to want to participate in it of their own volition.

The programme has certainly not been devised with delinquents or would-be delinquents in mind. It has been devised for all young people irrespective of their behavioural background. This much should quickly become obvious even from the most cursory glance.

- 3) True, in the suggested rite-of-passage programme in Part VIII, the social pressure to join is overwhelming and the social stigma of not doing so is considerable, but, at the end of the day, participation, so far as this particular programme has been planned, is voluntary.
- 4) When one takes into account the scale of the 'iceberg' aspect, referred to above, of unreported and therefore unrecorded offences, who is to say that we are not dealing with a majority of young people?

BUT DON'T WE ALREADY HAVE RITES OF PASSAGE?

Many people took the view that National Service was a fine rite of passage that created men out of boys. Some people feel that getting a job or becoming a parent is a practical substitute. They are right. But the problem is that these cures, in Western society at least, happen too late.

The Criminal Statistics, quoted above, tells us that 'most first convictions occur at age 17'. By the time young people, particularly young males, get a job or become parents, their lives may already have been blighted. The, I argue, quite natural agitation to leave childhood – and the personal devastation it can cause – can have its beginning as early as eight or ten. One would like to assuage these feelings, this book argues, at a much later age, as late as seventeen; but it seems too difficult to wait even until fourteen. This is the latest age, this book reluctantly suggests, that one can delay the beginning of a rite-of-passage programme.

As things are, getting a job, acquiring a girlfriend, living with a partner, getting married even – these are the palliatives which eventually do calm many 'angry young men' frustrated in their attempts to enter adulthood. This may not happen until a young person's twenties, maybe late twenties. By this time, their lives may well have been unnecessarily but perhaps irrevocably blighted.

STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

The book is divided into eight parts.

Part I: The Problem of Transition: identifies in general terms a procedural problem which besets Western society caused by an absence of any

rite of passage to embody and externalise the transition between childhood and adulthood.

Part II: *The Problem of Antisocial Behaviour* explores in more detail how juvenile delinquency, in particular, is a consequence of this lack of a key rite of passage for adolescents.

Part III: *The Persistence of Rituals in Society* describes the various types of human society, traditional and contemporary, which do not suffer from this problem; explores the extent to which these types of society and ours are mutually compatible; and introduces the anthropological theory behind rite of passage. The next two sections explore the rite-of-passage approach in two contrasting societies.

Part IV: *The Maasai Way* examines the circumcision rite of the Maasai tribe of Kenya and draws parallels to Western initiation rituals such as those of the Freemasons and the Jewish barmitzvah.

Part V: *The Japanese Way* explores Japanese culture and concludes that Japan's relatively low youth crime rates are related to the language of Japanese which obliges all its speakers, youth not excluded, to assess deference and respect and act accordingly. Both the Maasai and Japanese cultures have traditionally and successfully transformed their young, in very different ways. Together they provide a framework from which to pick and choose when designing a programme of our own.

Part VI: *The Power of Ritual and Myth* reviews the meaning and power of ritual and explores different aspects of myth, before posing a contemporary Western myth in which the capricious and dangerous passage of adolescents between childhood and adulthood is dependent on the Destiny. A course of ritual action designed to propitiate Destiny is what is required to transform this into both a myth for our times and a model for exemplary behaviour. The question is: what kind of ritual action would apply to our day and age?

Part VII: *The Rite-of-Passage Experience* attempts to answer this question from a theoretical point of view by considering the work of Dr David Blumenkrantz's ROPE research project. Blumenkrantz has uniquely applied the idea of rite of passage in a contemporary modern setting and may be considered the father of modern rite of passage.

Finally Part VIII proposes an ambitious rite-of-passage plan, based on the principles discussed hitherto in the book; in this extended section I explore in detail the implications of such a plan and offer some tentative possibilities for the future.

CAUTION

As a philosophical point, everything we have to say stems from the observation that life in Western society would be improved by the introduction of a formal rite of passage to embody and externalise the transition between childhood and adulthood. This is the subject matter of this book. But what if this observation is *wrong*?

The philosopher Bertrand Russell addresses this problem. In fact he characterises it as the principle difference between British and Continental philosophy. In a discussion between the methods of the British philosophers Locke and Hume and the Continental Leibniz he says:

In Locke or Hume, a comparatively modest conclusion is drawn from a broad survey of many facts, whereas in Leibniz a vast edifice of deduction is pyramided upon a pin-point of logical principle. In Leibniz, if the principle is completely true and the deductions are entirely valid, all is well; but the structure is unstable, and the slightest flaw anywhere brings it down in ruins. In Locke or Hume, on the contrary, the base of the pyramid is on the solid ground of observed fact, and the pyramid tapers upwards not downward; consequently the equilibrium is stable, and a flaw here or there can be rectified without total disaster.

Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (1945, p. 619)

As to the methodology here, you the reader will have to decide. The conclusion that Western society would be improved by the introduction of rite of passage derives from 'a broad survey of many facts'. Hopefully we are putting in place a pyramid with a stable equilibrium which 'tapers upwards not downward'.

PART I

THE PROBLEM OF TRANSITION

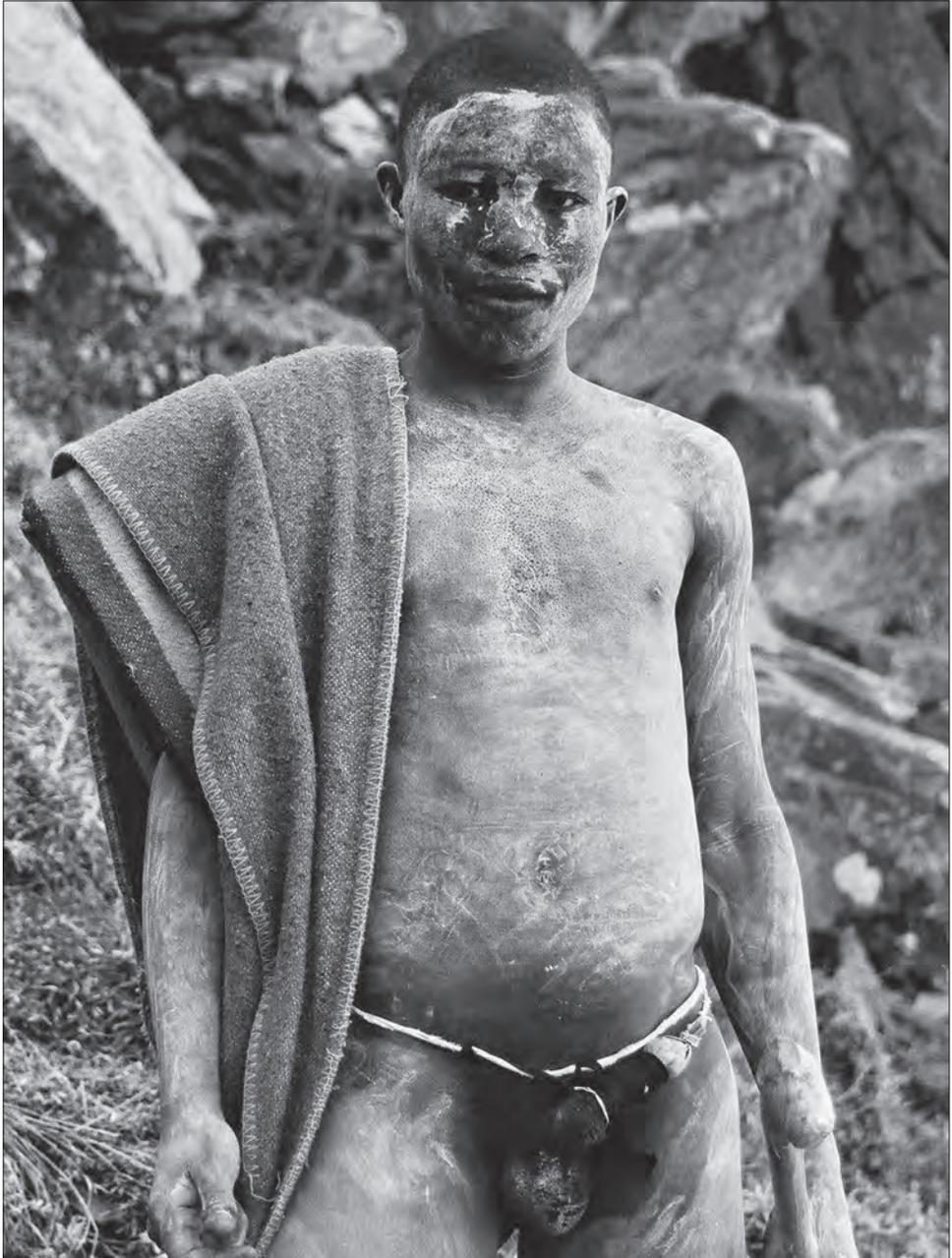
All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages:

Shakespeare: *As You Like It* (II: vii)

THE PROBLEM OF TRANSITION

For this Xhosa boy and many other children in highly ritualised societies, transition is socially organized. In many African cultures, white (clay or chalk) is a symbol of death. This young man will 'die' and 'wake up' a man – that is, if he survives circumcision.

Photography © Ramón Arellano



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THE ARGUMENT

The argument in this book is that:

- 1) Antisocial behaviour in young people has a very precise cause.
- 2) The cause is young people's drive to exit childhood at the earliest opportunity.
- 3) There is no state-organised programme to accomplish this; there should be.
- 4) The drive to exit childhood at the earliest opportunity varies from child to child. Some children drift out of childhood effortlessly; many do not.
- 5) The degree to which each child finds it a problem to exit childhood is the degree to which each child displays antisocial behaviour. This ranges from no antisocial behaviour at all to mild fractiousness to sustained criminality.
- 6) Those children to whom status-transition is a problem take matters into their own hands in the absence of a state-organised programme. As things stand, they have little alternative.
- 7) The force behind the drive to exit childhood, the desire for status-transition, is sociological, not psychological.
- 8) Sociological force produces social pressure. Insofar as a young person reacts at all to this social pressure, he or she may do so individually or as a member of a small informal peer group, often called a gang.
- 9) The vast majority of young people reacting to the drive to exit childhood are, from a medical point of view, psychologically healthy. The drive to exit childhood is natural and should be seen as such. Antisocial behaviour is an unhealthy reaction to a natural drive.

- 10) An opportunity to put 'clear blue water' between current perceived status and despised childhood status may be marked by an act of antisocial behaviour.
- 11) There is a powerful reason why behaviour is frequently *antisocial*. Antisocial behaviour most markedly demonstrates departure from childhood norms. Childhood is characterised by conformity and obedience to parental and other social controls.
- 12) Most acts of antisocial behaviour are to be seen as part of a child's ad hoc, unstructured and opportunistic programme to exit childhood.
- 13) However not everything that young people do to differentiate themselves from childhood is negative. Voluntary service, particularly voluntary service overseas, as well as gap years at home and abroad, are positive, beneficial and socially approved – and rightly so.

I further argue that:

- 1) We are dealing with a status-transition problem.
- 2) This problem has a solution; indeed, more than one.
- 3) The solution is to be found in highly ritualised societies which are masters of the art of status-transition.
- 4) In formulating a rite-of-passage programme, our society can adopt the principles of highly ritualised societies and adapt them to our ways.