

Primitive View of the World

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This month I had a brief experience which seemed to open a window on the state of primitive man in this world. I had gotten up as usual and was in my office around 5:00 o'clock standard time, and looked out my window. Outside the window there is the garage portion of this house; above it there extends the top of a poplar tree, and beyond a branch of the Sierra Nevada, a portion reaching a bit over 10,000 feet with the small pines garmenting it on part of its sides, but mostly bare. As I looked out, I saw the poplar tree standing still, for there seemed to be no movement in the air. Then suddenly, I saw motion in the tree. I could not immediately classify it or determine its causality; and for a brief moment I saw nature as it could appear to primitive man. There was motion, which I did not immediately classify, and I sensed a view of nature as something large and threatening—something that aroused a vague fear within me. A moment later, my vision cleared, and I saw that the motion was the fluttering of the leaves caused by some air current, and the vague fear disappeared. All became ordered. But in that brief moment, I saw, or thought I saw, how nature must appear to primitive, non-scientific man as something large and also something threatening.

Then I saw why these primitives developed a kind of magic to ward off the threat of the surrounding world—something strange and alien that can produce upheavals beyond man's control: the thunder and lightning, the shaking of the earth in an earthquake, the outbreak of volcanic action, the danger from formidable beasts, the cold and the heat, all carrying a threat to life. And to forestall this, they build a magic conception, the performance of sacrifices; even the emulation of human beings in the furnaces of the Carthaginians, or upon the sacrificial pyramids of the early Americans, for this that is outside carries a threat to primitive man. Then I thought of how *we* deal with that problem, and I looked around in my room. Before me there were four shelves, four rising compartments to the ceiling containing books covering many fields, including the scientific, the mathematical, the philosophical, the mystical. And behind me was another set of books, including dictionaries and other reference works; to my right, a recorder upon which I may record my thought. Here was my citadel, out beyond was this threatening nature, and with the resources of this citadel, I realized that I had achieved a certain control of that threatening nature. Not like primitive man, who uses ritual, sacrifice, and the like, but, I was secured by the power of knowledge.

It is very difficult for modern man, nurtured in a culture dominated by science, to recover the primitive point of view—nay, even the point of view of the new born babe who has known nothing of determination by culture. How does nature appear to us? What is the character of the sensuous view of the world freed from all interpretation? This is difficult to recover. William James tells us that he tried this and what he found was simply a “. . . blooming, buzzing confusion.”¹ It's a view in which there are no trees, no

¹ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1890), 488.

rocks, no bushes, no mountains, lakes or rivers, no railroads, no towns, no automobiles, no airplanes, nothing identified and named, nothing classified, nothing ordered under a law of causality, nothing seen as representing a logical and expected development, just a “. . . blooming, buzzing confusion.” Only as we acquire culture do we see these trees, bushes, rocks, planes and mountains, railroads and airplanes, and cities, and the like. There is differentiation, there is classification, there is causal conception, there is logical development; and through such spectacles we view this primitive world.

Now, I had a brief glimpse of that primitive view on the morning of the 10th of this month, and I felt its threat. It felt like something alien and alive, and not friendly to me. Behind my books I found a protective citadel whereby all that was in nature stood classified, or classifiable, all was seen as the expression of law, all had an ordered-ness that appeared logical and dependable.

Now, these two views represent the orientation first, to a pure sensuous view of nature where there is no conceptuality. That is the primitive view. The view we have is one which is governed and dominated by a conceptual orientation. What would one find if he could remove that conceptual orientation and go forth into a pure sensuous experience? The glimpse I had seems to indicate that it would be a threatening environment, something unfriendly, something that carries the implication of an effort to overthrow me in my command and submerge me into an indeterminate somewhat without any element of understanding. As this strikes me, it is an awful experience, a something that is definitely strange and alien.

In *The Secret Doctrine* there is a story which is told of an event which happened in the early history of this humanity. It is there said, that when the life impulse in this world had finally evolved creatures that could be represented as the culmination of animal evolution and were called “ape-like creatures,” something radical happened in connection with the evolutionary story. There was, it is said, a class of *Dhyan Chohans*, namely, those who are generally called “ex-men,” who had evolved to this status from the basis of some other planetary life; that a class of these had been guilty of some important error, the nature of which is such that we at our present level of understanding could not grasp its meaning. It is said further that the *karmic* penalty of this error was that these entities would have to descend back to an early stage of their own evolutionary development, not so far as to the very bottom, but the level represented by these ape-like creatures, and that they would have to enter into these creatures to lead their evolutionary development. As can be easily understood, there was reluctance on the part of these fallen *Dhyan Chohans*, or *Manasaputra*, to enter into such an intimate relationship with sheer animality, even though it was the most evolved level of animality in this world.

I think we can see what this reluctance would be like. Imagine those of us who had attained to a level of superior cultural appreciation and interest were to face the command to go into the place dwelling place of those creatures who dwell in the sewers. It is that said that some of the representatives of the *Manasaputra* obeyed at once, and entered into these ape-like creatures; others projected a ray; and still others overshadowed their ape-like creatures. It is further said that not all of the present races of men have had the admission of these representatives of the *Manasaputra*, that certain ones were not sufficiently fit, and of these who did not receive this acquisition the natives of Australia

and the Bushmen of Africa are named, and others are indicated;² but all those races which are in a leading position in our cultural development in this world, have either received a representative of the *Manasaputra*, who entered in fully, or sent a ray from themselves into their corresponding receptacles, or overshadowed. This means that the entities in this world who received such representatives of the *Manasaputra* have a principle in their constitution which the rest of humanity and the animal world do not have. This is the principle of mind in the sense of the conceptual mind, the *Buddhi*, not necessarily in the sense of the sense mind, which the animal also possesses.

Now, this gives to the conceptual principle a status that is outside the natural evolution of the animal toward the human, but as something that descended from on high. Now, this brings into our picture of the development of mankind an extremely important element. Nascent man, in the form of the ape-like creature, and all of the other animals, and the creatures lying below the animal level, may be viewed as the creatures, and even the slaves, of nature. They do not command nature, they are expressions of nature; and they may, by their rituals, their dances, their sacrifices, believe that they can help themselves from the threat of powers in nature that are too great for them. But they do not have the resource that can command understanding and the power to exert a will in connection with the control of natural forces. But when the conceptual principle comes into the picture, the situation is changed. Then there is the power of real authentic thought brought into the situation: the power to conceive, and along with it, the power, in variable degree, of being able to command the forces of nature. It is because of his conceptual power that the relatively physically weak entity which is man today actually rules all the animal world, and the vegetable kingdoms, if he wishes to exert that power. But a commanding thought that builds the resources that makes science, philosophy, and mathematics possible. It's not natural men that produced these achievements, but *manasic* man, the descent from the *Manasaputra*.

Now arises a question which each one can put to himself, with which do you identify? First, do you identify with the ape-like creature and feel a representative of the *Manasaputra* riding on your back and perhaps resenting it? Or, do you identify with the fallen *Manasaputra* riding on the back of an ape-like creature, one from whom you would prefer to be separated, perhaps, even though you may accept the obligation imposed by *karmic* decree. These two attitudes present themselves before us. Do you naturally gravitate to the animal-like interests—a great lover of the things of the table, of muscular manifestation, and the like? Then you are oriented to the ape-like creature. Or do you gravitate to the command and understanding of conceptual thought, and look upon these other things as incidents with which you have to deal? It makes a large difference. If you take the latter position, you may find it actually distasteful to have an animal body; such was said to be the case with Plotinus, the greatest of the Neo-Platonists. And such was quite clearly the case with Shankara, who described the body in terms that make it very unattractive. The two positions lie before us. We can choose with which identification we will align ourselves. The animal in us is the child of nature. The conceptual thinker in us is the potential ruler of nature. With which do you identify yourself?

² H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Press, Wheaton, 1893), 176-178.

If we look back into classical culture, we will find these two aspects of our total being well represented. The one, that which is oriented to the animal, is presented in the form of the Dionysian spirit—the indulgence of all forms of vice and self-satisfaction in the lower sense: bloodiness, murder, and the like. Or, we see there the Apollonian spirit, oriented to the principles of art and philosophy, and the higher elements in the culture of man. Corresponding to the two elements in our composition, represented by the ape-like creature and the *Manasaputra*, there are two functions of cognition, namely, sense perception corresponding to the ape-like creature and conceptual cognition or intellectual thought corresponding to the *Manasaputra*. Sense perception is a function that man holds in common with the animal world; very often, in fact, the sensational capacity of the animal may be in some respects more acute than that in the case of man. But the animal does not have the conceptual power which is the power that makes language possible, and all conceptual thought possible, and, thus, all of science, mathematics, philosophy, and other literature that is conceptually organized possible.

Generally in the history of thought, or philosophy, and of psychology, these two functions of cognition are the only two recognized. In the case of the Buddhist logician Dignaga, it is fundamental to his system that there are these two forms, and only these two forms. Dharmakirti, the other Buddhist logician, essentially agrees, though he does admit a possible exception in the case of the saint, who may have another cognitive power, in his opinion. But in general in the history of philosophic thought, these are the two functions of cognition recognized, and the only two.

Now, which one has priority? Which wields the greater authority? On this question the philosophers have been historically divided, even radically divided. When philosophic thought broke out in the modern period in the case of Descartes, he developed a philosophy that gave definite priority to the rational or conceptual side, and he and the other representatives of the school gave primary emphasis to this aspect, even maintaining that man carried with him from birth innate ideas, and he gave definitely greater importance to this function. However, there been other philosophic schools that have taken the reverse position. In particular, the empiricist school which was founded by John Locke and continued especially by Bishop Berkeley and David Hume. And in our own time, this emphasis has been continued in the school known as Pragmatism, founded by William James, John Dewey, Peirce, F.C.S. Schiller, and Bergson. The emphasis of one side or the other is much more ancient than this, for if we go back to the time of Plato, we find a recognition of these two modes of cognition; but Plato, for his part, gives the primacy to the universals, which is the domain of the conceptual thinking *par excellence*, and gives subordinate position to the sensational form of cognition. Aristotle would apparently not follow Plato in this emphasis, and the distinction can be traced throughout the history of the Scholastics. I shall not attempt to argue the different positions presented here, particularly as the time is far too short. And, in fact, there are volumes of philosophic work in which one can trace the arguments for the various positions. But certain points have been brought out in the interaction between the rationalists of continental Europe and the empiricists of the British Isles. The consequences of radical empiricism were brought out very clearly by David Hume, and he showed that on the basis of this knowledge, we could have no knowledge of law. In other words, although the sun had been experienced as rising for a million times, we'd have no certainty that it would arise for the millionth and first time. It was this situation of radical agnosticism that awakened Immanuel Kant from what he called

his dogmatic sleep, and he attempted, apparently with considerable success, to open a way to a more secure knowledge.

Without something in addition to sheer experience, no logic, no mathematics, no science, would be possible. It thus appears that knowledge of law, of the principle of interrelationship, is original in the conceptual order or function that we possess. Thus, the theory that the conceptual order is only instrumental, as the Pragmatists maintain, therefore does not appear to be sound. But I shall not attempt here to argue this position, merely to bring it out, and to make explicit my own position with respect to it. I definitely give primacy to the conceptual order with respect to the sensational order. I give more importance to the *relational* factor than to the *term* factor. To be sure, facts are—I do not question that—and that facts may be very well sensationally determined; but, what is the significance of the fact is not sensationally determined. This question of significance requires conceptual reflection. Understanding and significance—meaning—are interests that are preeminently in the field of the conceptual thinker. Facts are important, but for myself, the meaning of a fact is more important.

Now, in my own position I have found that not all of our means of cognition can be reduced to these two. I introduce a third form of cognition, and I originated a name for it. I called it “introception.” It is akin to sensational knowledge in the sense of being immediate; even more immediate than sensational knowledge, for sensational knowledge is based upon the mediation of a sense organ, whereas introceptual knowledge is based on the principle of *knowledge through identity*, or *knowledge by identity*, to use Sri Aurobindo’s expression. This is a kind of knowledge which is neither conceptual nor sensational. It is that kind that one experiences or realizes when he has an enlightening breakthrough, where he has something like a cosmic, or even more than cosmic, perception, and knows with an order of certainty far transcending that of sense perception or of logical deduction. But it is a knowledge that does not fit either the categories of sense perception or the categories of conceptual cognition. It would, thus, remain essentially a private knowledge unless one could in some way communicate something of it either through art, which would be by the employment of some sensuous medium, or by logical thought. In this there is inevitably a difficulty because it fits neither the categories of sense perception nor the categories of conceptual cognition, and therefore one has to use skill to suggest this meaning which transcends the medium by which it is communicated.

I conceive of man as primarily a triune being. At the top, he is a spiritual or divine entity, and this corresponds to the cognitive function which I have called “introception.” On the intermediate level, he is a mental being, and this corresponds to the cognitive function which I have called conception. And at the bottom, he is a physical, sensuous entity, and this corresponds to sensation or perception. The mental principle is, thus, the intermediate principle, and the order here is definitely hierarchical. The highest principle is the most important, and the physical sensational principle the outermost and the most incidental. In connection with yoga, if man starts on the ordinary level of identification with his outer physical sensational nature, the path, the royal path as I conceive it, is through his mental being up to his spiritual nature, or that which corresponds to introception. This I would call the royal path of yoga, but it is evidently not the only path. As I understand the Zen Buddhists, for

instance, they aim to bypass the intellectual or conceptual entity through a direct relationship between the sensational being and the introceptual being. This is not a path with which I am familiar, and I disagree with its tendency to give to the perceptual entity a certain primacy over the conceptual. But there are those for whom this path seems to be the valid path, and I do not insist, ever, that everyone shall take precisely the same path or the path which I find fits my needs especially. But this organization is of significance in connection with the path that one chooses.

Now a final thought comes to me. If one considers the message given in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, there is a language that presupposes a point of view connected with either the Tibetan writers, or even more writers, that is rather alien to our Western background and point of view. We do not think in terms of demons and benevolent gods. They are not part and parcel of our thought and life, as no doubt they are for those who have constructed these books. Would it not therefore be possible that our experience on entering into the zone beyond the event of death that we'll meet a different order of inner experiences? I merely throw this out as a suggestion.