

What is a Point of View?

Part 2.

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(Note: This is the second and concluding part of this article. Part 1 appeared in the "Clarion" of September 1st.)

I have, in this article, to make use of some more or less unfamiliar terms, therefore, to commence with, here are their dictionary definitions, as follows:—

ANIMATE—Living: Possessed of animal life.

INANIMATE—Without animation or life.

ANIMISM—A theory which regards the belief in separate spiritual existence as the germ of religious ideas. The belief is considered to have arisen from the evidence of the senses, interpreted by the crude and child-like science of the savages.

(Latin—*anima*, the soul).

ANTHROPOMORPHISM—The representation of the Deity in the form of man or with bodily parts: the ascription to the Deity of human affections and passions. (Greek—*Anthropos*, man, *morphe*, form).

Also, as additional authoritative testimony on "Animism" I quote from a small volume published by Constable & Co., London, one of a series on "Religions: Ancient and Modern." The volume in question treats of, "The Religion of Ancient Greece." The author of the volume is, Jane Ellen Harrison, honorary degrees Aberdeen and Durham, staff lecturer and sometime Fellow of Newnham College, Cambridge. Says the author:—

"The study of comparative religion shows that man does not at the outset attribute complete personality to the things he worships. Personality comes with the giving of human or animal form. Before complete impersonation, we have "animism," when the gods are intangible Things, powerful but not personal, dwelling anywhere, everywhere. These Things are scarcely, in our sense, gods; but they become gods when man enters into relation with them, localizes them, fixes them by some form of worship. Wholly personal they scarcely become until an artist makes of them some image, however rude, or a poet takes them as material for a story. With animism is closely connected fetich—worship. Man imagines that the spirit things he vaguely conceives of dwell in chance natural objects, and chiefly in stones or trees."

This article is part two and conclusion of my discussion of the nature of a point of view, the first part of which saw print in the issue of the 1st of September. In that issue I tried to describe a point of view as a system of principles and standards of judgments, which served as the bases of opinion upon any social facts brought to our attention. Such principles and standards of judgment, I also tried to show, were mental prepossessions (a bias possessed beforehand) which, in the main, were acquired unconsciously under the disciplinary influence of habits of life enforced by the manner of procuring a livelihood, and by those entailed in conforming to the conventional institutions and standards of conduct pertaining to any definite form of social organization. Under the long term disciplinary influence of habits of life, such mental prepossessions as make up a point of view become habits of thought and as such there is resort to them without conscious effort when opinion is expressed upon any matter.

The principles and standards of judgment of a point of view acquired in this way are held unquestioned and uncritically, being not of reasoned conviction. Nevertheless, their hold on the mind is perhaps all the more tenacious, as indefeasibly right and good and common-sense principles, because they are a matter of unreasoning habit. Such is the genesis and nature of those unreasoned out principles and standards of judgment, as well as the quality of their hold on the mind, with which men rise to a reasoned consideration of facts. In part I. I also endeavored to throw in contrast the bourgeois point of view and the socialist point of view as, in their principles and standards, fundamentally op-

posed to each other. I pointed out that the bourgeois point of view being the traditional point of view, was maintained in the minds of the people by the inertia of habits and by control of educational institutions and other means for forming opinion in the interest of a parasitic social class, long after the material conditions had passed away which had given that point of view what validity it may ever have had. I pointed out also that the socialist point of view, on the other hand, was born of the social facts of today and that its principles and standards struck the note of a new order of social life based on production for use instead of for profit. I further stated that the socialist task was to remove the bourgeois point of view from the minds of the working class and to substitute in its place the socialist point of view; and that thus the nature of a point of view had a bearing on our educational work both as to its character and our methods.

To throw further light, if I can, on the question, "What is a point of view?" I deal in this issue with "animism", a point of view on external facts of man's environment which found universal expression among primitive savage peoples; and which, moreover, is so natural to man that it has still persisted in varied forms down through succeeding ages, though with continually lessening force. I selected animism because I thought the simplicity of its elements and the artless quality of primitive man's thought reactions to his environment would be easily comprehended, more be-taken that, in those respects as well as others, there remains a good big chunk of primitive in us yet.

Though I am dealing with Animism, I am not giving any complete survey, however brief, of that conception of things. My account of it will be of the sketchiest, just what I consider necessary for my purpose, but sufficient, I hope, to be suggestive and provocative of thought on my primary theme.

Students of Primitive Society tell us of the enormous part played in it by animal tales, myths and cults. The primitive savage of the infancy of the human race, dramatised the things of the world coming under his observation. His view of them was what is termed, a subjective view, that is, he saw them not in the objective matter-of-fact way of modern science, but through the medium of his own personality. Both inanimate as well as animate things were conceived to be possessed of spirit. Streams, rocks, trees, fire, etc., as well as the animal kind, were credited with having a life of will and purpose, and of fears, loves and hates like man's own. External objects were believed to do things, or rather it was believed they were seen to do things. It was to that way of conceiving of inanimate things rather than of animate things to which has been given the term "animism."

The beliefs of many savage or semi-savage tribes today illustrate this trait. The Pueblo potters (women) are said to believe that certain clays have likes and dislikes for each other. Such a conception arises, no doubt, from some such experience as that certain clays will not properly amalgamate, and also that one kind of clay may be necessary as tempering material for another. Many primitive peoples also impute spiritual qualities and magic virtues to their tools and weapons. Perhaps vestigial remains of that trait are retained by us to this day in our habitual use of the feminine gender in referring to machines, engines, etc. It is still customary with us to refer to a ship in that way; and the old time deep water sailor's superstitious regard for the spiritual qualities of his ship is at least a matter of repute, if not now a matter of fact with his degenerate successor. Then there is the wholly illusory, though edifying and consolatory belief so prevalent today in regard to social affairs, that there is an ameliorative trend in things—almost it is primitive animism again, stripped of anthropomorphic elements—a trustful faith in evolution as though the evolutionary theory postulated developmental progression only, and not also retrogression, as is required in the conception of modern science of a process of mechanical causation.

In the course of immense periods of time under the disciplinary influence of matter-of-fact experience, less and less of spiritual endowment is imputed to inanimate objects themselves, and anthropomorphic or man-like agencies are conceived to carry on their life and work in some degree of detachment from material objects. The principle of animism, which is only a more archaic form of anthropomorphism, is maintained, but is now expressed in anthropomorphic terms. At this stage, approximately, anthropomorphic religion definitely makes its appearance in human affairs. There is then

much further and more elaborate myth making until, as Veblen with sly humour puts it:

"In the course of elaboration and refinement there may emerge a monotheistic and providential Creator seated in an infinitely remote but ubiquitous space of four dimensions."

The trait or propensity of man for projecting his personality into external objects, found a much more favorable field for expressing itself among animate or living things than among the inanimate. In respect of animate things, for obvious reasons animism maintained itself longest and in greater force. Savage man regarded the animal kind quite literally as a part of his community and with having a "consciousness of kind" with himself. His myths and legends of animals tell us that, captured or killed in the chase, they yet let themselves be so done to. Thus were produced not merely the multitudes of tales and legends of savage peoples dwelling affectionately upon the activities and features of animals, but also those elaborate rites and cults which made animals ancestors, heroes, tribal figure-heads and divinities. Man, down even to this day, is an inveterate nature-fakir, as the late Teddy Roosevelt knew, but time and the cultural disciplines of work-day habits of life entailed in tending, breeding and improving stock, and of using domesticated animals, as well as the disciplines of other modes of life brought on with the progress of the industrial arts, have weakened that animistic habit. Those matter-of-fact disciplines have induced more matter-of-fact mental prepossessions also in regard to animate as well as inanimate phenomena. The saying that "familiarity breeds contempt" is true in its rigorous meaning only sometimes. It is more universally true that familiarity breeds matter-of-fact knowledge, and is thus the dispeller of illusions oftentimes mere matters-of-make-believe.

At a certain stage of social development, long after the magic and myth making of savage society is left behind, we arrive approximately at a point when certain forms of man's beliefs and ceremonial practices may be characterized as definitely religious. At this stage, the anthropomorphic gods who walk with the children of men are innumerable: gods that were tribal ancestors, gods of localities, of the seasons and the elements, gods of war and of industrial pursuits, gods malevolent and beneficent. But gradually, with the increase of knowledge born of experience with external facts, the spirit powers are pushed further into the back ground of observed phenomena, many of them to be dispensed with altogether. This process is also furthered by the amalgamation of the tribes and the federation of independent towns and cities into political unities, and by the growing intercourse among peoples through trade and commerce and travel, followed as a result by the exchange of ideas and the growth and general diffusion of knowledge: And last, but not least, it was also furthered by the political needs of the great Imperialisms, which, antagonistic, demanded unity in religious ideas as well as political in the interest of the centralised State. So finally, there emerges triumphant over the autonomous gods the monotheistic God, Supreme overlord of the universe. And, as evidence of the effect of a highly institutionalised social organization on the mental outlook, the people of the middle ages conceived of God, and of the subordinate spiritual powers of the upper and the nether worlds, as organized according to the feudal model of status. And in respect of the science of the time, speaking of the ancient, but more enlightened Greeks, and their conception of universal laws having a guiding control over the course of things human and in nature, Professor Dewey has this to say of the related conception of the Middle Ages:

The Middle Ages added to this Greek idea of control the idea of a command proceeding from a superior will; and hence thought of the operations of nature as if they were a fulfilment of a task set by one who had authority to direct action."

With the passing of years since the middle ages, the Animistic preconception continued to lose force as a result of the influence of scientific thought and enquiry, together with the increasing control over natural forces exercised by man through modern industrial processes. So that it has come to be said that the modern working class, especially those in the mechanical trades, are irreligious by occupation. The old anthropomorphic conceptions of a personal God and personal Devil only continue to exist in

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