

Pre-Historic Ideas of Unity

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1. PRE-HISTORIC IDEAS OF UNITY

a. Animism

The term 'Animism' derives from the ancient Latin term 'anima' meaning breath, soul, life, spirit and the essence seen in plants, animals, and non-living matter. Further, it is the belief in a supernatural power that organises and animates the material world. Jung² selected the term 'anima' to denote his experience of the soul of a man as an inner woman and container of unconscious contents. The soul functions not only as a container but also as an animating principle of ideas projected onto objects. Animism is not a religion in the strict sense, but a natural progression from our animal ancestry to the first stage of self-awareness in our human evolution. Some scholars believe that animals also live in a world of animated gods and demons, which exerts an influence on their behaviour. At most, we could say that Animism is the foundation or beginnings of religion in the individual as Edward Tyler the English anthropologist explains.

Here, they would naturally say, are men who have no religion because their forefathers had none, men who represent a pre-religious condition of the human race, out of which in the course of time religious conditions have arisen.³

Animism is the psychological system of projection of inner fantasies, ideas or characters onto physical objects and other people. It is an automatic process whose function is to attract or repel the subject to the object. It is a hallmark of early human evolution to project a great deal of the contents of the psyche onto objects based on its behaviour. It is therefore an early form of unity between subject, the physical reality of the object and the projected idea of the object with its associated energy and emotion.

Our animistic origins has to some extent fallen back into the unconscious as the physical sciences has de-potentiated objects through knowledge, and transformed the projections into ideas more aligned with the object. Knowledge helps us see the object as it is rather than how we imagine it to be. Projection of inner contents activates when knowledge reaches its limits and the void filled with ideas of the object. For example, the further we explore outer space, the more fanciful the ideas become. The ancients

¹ I use the term 'belief' from our viewpoint, as I have no doubt that Animism is a concrete reality to early human individual perception.

² JUNG, C. G., 'Aion, Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self, Princeton University Press 1979

³ TYLER, E. B., 'Primitive Culture' Volume 1, John Murray 1920, Page 418

projected their inner gods onto the planets because they had insufficient knowledge of their true nature. This is typical of the animistic system of projection and is a natural mechanism of connection to the object, so that we can learn more about it. The difference between animism and our contemporary viewpoint is only a matter of degree and as I shall show later in this study, always has its base in the physical world. Tyler continues with his description of the opposites in early humans:

In the first place, what is it that makes the difference between a living body and a dead one; what cause waking sleep, trance, disease, death? In the second place, what are those human shapes which appear in dreams and visions? Looking at these two groups of phenomena, the ancient savage philosophers probably made their first step by the inference that every man has two things belonging to him, namely, a life and a phantom.⁴

Tyler recognises that contents projected onto objects in animism have their origin in what he calls the 'phantom'. We can also observe the opposites of 'life and phantom' in animals and how they project ideas into the physical world which invokes either fear or bravery, and keeps them out of harm or emboldens them to action. I have no doubt that when an animal cowers in a thunderstorm; they are projecting an unknown entity onto what they hear making loud claps and other threatening sounds, howling wind and rain, and they protect themselves accordingly.

Projection becomes even more problematic when dealing with other people. It is only in the last century with the advent of the psychological sciences, that we attempt to transform these projections and see them at their source. One such example is an individual's trust in authority figures and the need to build and participate in hierarchies. This natural form of projection to be part of a hierarchy bonds people to a common cause, but it also reduces individual responsibility and gives people power to act as a collective. This form of authority projection has major benefits for building culture, and also drawbacks when groups come into conflict.

Other remnants of our Animistic roots are the projection of evil onto what we feel are our enemies with different values. Local moral codes control the projection of evil and self-analysis can temper it on a personal level. Collectively, the projection of evil is the motivating force behind national and world conflicts. Boundaries to collective projection are weak and easily overcome,⁵ and not solved by collective means. Self-analysis of the projection in every individual is the only solution to collective projections. It

⁴ Ibid, Page 428

⁵ I refer to international law and the United Nations, which are often ignored by powerful nations.

requires an individual to stand alone, be critical of his or her own values and the realisation they are siding with all that is good in their own nature and projecting evil onto their neighbour.

Contemporary mythology has incorporated our technological advances and are expressed as alien species, flying saucers, galactic adventures, and so on. Motion pictures are one of these expressions and they keep us in touch with our mythological projections, as well as filling the void where knowledge is lacking. For example, Physics is not immune to psychological projection. The Higgs Boson particle discovered in 2013 and flippantly called the 'God particle', presumably because of its influence on the other particles in the atom. Another example is the 'Big Bang Theory' and the idea that nothing gave birth to the universe in an instant, which has more in common with ancient creation myths than known facts.

The above instances show that humans project a great deal of their psyches onto the physical world. What we believe or think about something may not necessarily be the whole reality of that object. Self-analysis, reflection, and personal isolation are methods to become aware of projection. Knowledge of the object also aids in the transformation of projection into an idea more aligned to the object. This encourages the differentiation of the idea and the object. The more an individual learns about an object, the more the idea approximates the reality of the object. We cannot however, remove the idea. We can know an object thoroughly with all its characteristics, but still have an idea of the object. What this shows is that the idea is as real as the physical object. The difficulty is recognising the difference between the projected idea and what the object is in itself. This aspect of our functioning also questions our perception of reality and leads us to conclude that part of reality, is psychic. This is a viewpoint also shared by Jung and Kant.

The value of animism today as an early form of projection, is its connection to the myth making unconscious. It is important to note that it is impossible to unlearn knowledge once gained through science of the physical world, but it is possible to connect to the primitive functioning of animism in ourselves. For example, when our car malfunctions when needed, we get annoyed and it affects our psyche. The uncooperative car has invited a projection and relationship to that projection. We know logically that it was a faulty car battery, but we do not know why the battery failed at this time. We can dismiss it and make other arrangements or look at the projection and ask why the car did not cooperate when needed? Where were we going in the car and what were we going to do when we got there? These questions may have relevance on the timing of the car malfunction and its relationship to an inner compensation or

movement. In this way, we differentiate the object and the idea and see how they interact with each other.

This approach endows physical objects with an animating quality that gives our lives meaning and protects us from danger. The difference between early human animism and our contemporary standpoint is the degree of awareness involved in projection, and this aspect alone separates us from our animistic origins. Our current level of awareness and rationality, see that the car malfunctions for one or other reasons but do not know why it malfunctioned at this time. Asking this question brings it back to the psychic realm and the meaning behind the malfunction. This is one method of raising our level of awareness and relationship to the object. Early humans projected much of their psychic contents onto objects, animals, people etc., and they used ritual to understand the object by forming a relationship to it through projection.

b. Ritual- De-potentiating the Environment

Early humans had an innate ability to ritualise their unconscious projections as an attempt to relate to the object. For example, the idea of a lion projected onto the actual lion was the starting point for the relationship. It is difficult to relate⁶ to a lion in the wild directly without the necessary safeguards. The lion's behaviour which is part of its idea, can be observed from a distance. In other words, the idea of the lion includes its strength, power and majesty, which are admirable traits in a human and form an identification based on projection. Humans share these traits and is the reason the lion is used for royal and cultural emblems.

Rituals express the symbolic unity of idea and object to gain some control and influence over the object and learn about its true nature. It is less likely that a wild animal will attack if you have some form of relationship to it and your idea is closer to the animal's reality. A devouring lion is a horrific thought and adding this to our idea of a lion modifies our behaviour and protects us from harm. In other words, we try to avoid being devoured by referring to the idea of the lion, which changes the way we behave. The lion does not modify our behaviour, the idea of it does. If we had never seen or heard of a lion, we would unknowingly walk into their territory and potential harm. Knowledge of the object transforms our idea of it and we can protect ourselves from its true nature.

The very fact that a lion will devour someone to satiate its hunger is almost secondary to the projected idea of a displeased lion attacking a

⁶ I acknowledge under rare circumstances such as raising a lion from birth enables a different relationship to one in the wild.

tribe and devouring one of its members. The reason for the devouring is not so much the lion being hungry and a person being in the wrong place at the wrong time, but the idea of the lion being displeased with the tribe and taking vengeance on an unfortunate member. This appeases the tribe's sensibility and gives a symbolic reason for the devouring of one of their members, which in turn leads to efforts to protect against and appease the lion in the future.

This example shows the reality of the projected idea from the individual. In this instance, the idea of the lion is more important than the simple fact that the lion was hungry and ate what was close by and available at the time. If we relate to the idea, we feel that we have the potential to influence its effect on us. Ritual also takes the form of worship of an idea and modifies the group's behaviour accordingly. If a ritual has benefit for a people, it protects them from harm, teaches them how to behave and provides a relationship to the object of worship. When repeated as a ritual, it becomes a normal part of life and the beginning of religion.

Another example of a less threatening object is the projection onto the tree. Many cultures have ritualised the tree and it is an excellent hook for human projection. The tree connects the heavens with the terrestrial plain and the underworld through its roots. In animistic and religious traditions, the tree represents the life and uniqueness of the individual soul. The tree, as do humans, begins from a seed and grows to the nourishing light and air in the sky (consciousness) and down to the nourishing water and minerals inside the earth (unconscious). It is quite fitting that people identify themselves with a tree as a symbol and the associated rituals of growth in the spiritual and earthly realms.

Clifford Geertz⁷ shows how ritual brings together the 'model of' reality on the one hand and the 'model for' reality on the other. The psychologists call this the subject and object and Plato the 'model' and 'copy of the model', which in this book I call the relationship between idea and object. This relationship still pervades our everyday lives. For example, the ritual of shaking hands originated as a gesture of peace and display of a weapon-less hand. This simple ritual brings together the object, in this case another person, with the idea of the object, which includes the potential threat and danger and the open hand abrogates the potential threat.

Rituals are a feature of most, if not all cultures and the beginning of relationship to projected ideas and understanding human behaviour. Other examples of ritual include rites of passage; sacraments; purification

⁷ GEERTZ, Clifford (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books. p. 112.

rites; oaths of allegiance; dedication ceremonies and coronations. They all display a mode of behaviour that venerates the projected idea, and in some cases, reinforces and maintains the ideas power and influence over the individual. How would we feel about royals if it were not for all the pomp and ceremony surrounding them?

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