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RELIGIONS ANCIENT AND MODERN

THE  
PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIGIN  
AND THE NATURE OF  
RELIGION

## RELIGIONS: ANCIENT AND MODERN

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## PREFACE

THIS little book, the last of a series of similar volumes each containing an exposition by a recognised authority of one of the many Religions the world has known, might have been put with as much propriety at the head of the series, there to show how Religion originated in the mind of man, what mental powers it presupposes, what is its nature and what its relation to the non-religious life. But one is, no doubt, better able to take up profitably these problems after having familiarised oneself with the several aspects of religious life. Therefore *The Psychological Origin and the Nature of Religion* was placed at the end, where it fulfils the additional purpose of linking the concluded series of Histories of Religions with a cognate one, now being prepared by the same publishers, on Ancient and Modern Systems of Philosophy.

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# THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIGIN AND THE NATURE OF RELIGION

## CHAPTER I

### THE FUNDAMENTAL NATURE OF RELIGION

THE opinions advanced in this essay and the arguments with which they are supported will be more readily appreciated if the fundamental nature of Religion is set forth in a few introductory pages.

The students of Religion have usually been content to describe it either in intellectual or in affective terms. 'This particular idea or belief,' or 'this particular feeling or emotion,' is, they have said, 'the essence' or the 'vital element' of Religion. So that most of the hundreds of definitions which have been proposed fall into two classes. We have, on the one hand, the definitions of Spencer, Max Müller, Romanes, Goblet d'Alviella, and others, for whom Religion



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is 'the recognition of a mystery pressing for interpretation,' or 'a department of thought,' or 'a belief in superhuman beings'; and, on the other, the formulas of Schleiermacher, the Ritschlian theologians, Tiele, etc., who hold that Religion is 'a feeling of absolute dependence upon God,' or 'that pure and reverential disposition or frame of mind we call piety.' According to Tiele, 'the essence of piety, and, therefore, the essence of Religion, is adoration.'

The recent advance of psychological science and the increasingly careful and minute work of ethnographers have tended to discredit these one-sided conceptions. To-day it has become customary to admit that 'in Religion all sides of the personality participate. Will, feeling, and intelligence are necessary and inseparable constituents of Religion.' But statements such as this one do not necessarily imply a correct understanding of the functional relation of the three aspects of psychic life. One may be acquainted with the three branches of government—legislative, executive, and judicial—and nevertheless grossly misunderstand their respective functions. Pfleiderer, for instance, hastens to add to the sentences last quoted, 'Of course we must recognise that knowing and willing are

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here [in religion] not ends in themselves, as in science and in morality, but rather subordinate to feeling as the real centre of religious consciousness.' Thus feeling reappears as *the real centre* of religious consciousness. What the author may well have meant here by 'centre,' I do not know. A similar criticism is applicable to Max Müller and to Guyau. The latter begins promisingly with a criticism of the one-sided formulas of Schleiermacher and of Feuerbach, and declares that they should be combined. 'The religious sentiment,' says he, is 'primarily no doubt a feeling of dependence. But this feeling of dependence really to give birth to Religion must provoke in one a reaction—a desire for deliverance.' Very good, indeed! But, on proceeding, the reader discovers that the opinion the book defends is that 'Religion is the outcome of an effort to explain all things—physical, metaphysical, and moral—by analogies drawn from human society, imaginatively and symbolically considered. In short, it is a universal, sociological hypothesis, mythical in form.'<sup>1</sup> What is this but once more the intellectualistic position? Religion arising from an effort to *explain*; Religion an *hypothesis*! It is Herbert

<sup>1</sup> *The Non-Religion of the Future*, p. 2.

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Spencer over again with an additional statement concerning the way in which man attempts to explain 'the mystery pressing for interpretation.'

It must be admitted, however, that several of the more recent definitions have completely broken with this bad psychology. Among these are those of J. G. Frazer, of A. Sabatier, and of William James. The first understands by Religion 'propitiation, or conciliation of powers superior to man, which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life.'<sup>1</sup> For A. Sabatier, Religion 'is a commerce, a conscious and willed relation into which the soul in distress enters with the mysterious power on which it feels that it and its destiny depend.'<sup>2</sup> William James expresses his mind thus: 'In broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that religious life consists in the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto. This belief and this adjustment are the religious attitude of the soul. In the ordinary sense of the word, however, no attitude is accounted religious unless it be grave and serious; the trifling, sneering attitude of a

<sup>1</sup> *The Golden Bough*, 2nd edition, i. p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion*, p. 27.

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Voltaire must be thrown out if we would not strain the ordinary use of language. Moreover, there must be something solemn, serious, and tender about any attitude which we denominate Religion. If glad, it must not grin or snigger; if sad, it must not scream or curse. The sallies of a Schopenhauer and a Nietzsche lack the purgatorial note which religious sadness gives forth. And finally we must exclude also the chilling reflections of Marcus Aurelius on the eternal reason, as well as the passionate outcry of Job.<sup>1</sup>

But the battle against intellectualistic and affectivistic conceptions of Religion is not yet won. The recent definitions of Tiele and of Kaftan show only too clearly how strong the tendency remains to identify Religion with some feeling or emotion.

As the amazing discrepancies and contradictions offered by authorised definitions of Religion arise, in my opinion, primarily from a faulty psychology, a moment may profitably be devoted to an untechnical statement of the present teaching of that science upon the relation existing

<sup>1</sup> *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 53, 38, abbreviated and rearranged.

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between the three acknowledged modes of consciousness—willing, feeling, and thinking.

Aristotle characterised man as *thinking-desire*. In swinging back from Intellectualism to Voluntarism, modern psychology has accepted the fundamental truth excellently expressed by the Greek philosopher. 'Will is not merely a function which sometimes accrues to consciousness, and is sometimes lacking; it is an integral property of consciousness.'<sup>1</sup> Will without intelligence may be possible; but intelligence without will is not, not even in the case of so-called disinterested, theoretical thinking. There is, there can be, no thinking without desire, intention, or purpose. 'The one thing that stands out,' says, for instance, Professor Dewey, 'is that thinking is inquiry, and that knowledge as science is the outcome of systematically directed inquiry.' Thought absolutely undirected would be not even a dream—mere meaningless, chaotic atoms of thought. It is *the intention, the purpose*, which makes thought what it is; that is to say, significant. We think because we will. Thought does not exist for itself; it is the instrument of desire. To discover ways and means of gratifying proximate or distant desires, needs,

<sup>1</sup> Wünder's *Ethics*, English tr., iii. p. 6.



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cravings, is the function of intelligence. The psychologist speaks, therefore, of the *instrumental* character of thought, and considers cognition to be a function of conduct. The mastery of desire over thought is abundantly illustrated in the history of belief, and nowhere so strikingly as in Religion.

With regard to the relation of feeling to the will and to the intellect, it is to be observed that where there is desire for an object, there liking is present; and, conversely, where there is liking, there actual or potential desire is felt. As to sentiments and emotions, they involve ideas and conative elements in addition to sensations and feelings. An emotion is a reaction, the response of an organism to a situation. It is a form of action. Aristotle's characterisation of man is thus seen to be adequate; it does not leave out the feelings, as it might seem at first. Thinking-desire includes the affection since it is included in desire. Every pulse of consciousness is psychically compounded of will, feeling, and thought. Successive moments can differ one from the other neither in the absence of one or two of these three constituents, nor in the essential relation they bear to one another—that is fixed and unchangeable—but only in the intensity and

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vividness of their respective components. This, then, is the double teaching of psychology in this matter:—(1) Will, feeling, and thought enter in some degree into every moment of consciousness which can be looked upon as an actuality, and not merely as an abstraction; they are necessary constituents of consciousness. The unit of conscious life is neither thought, nor feeling, nor will, but all three in movement towards an object. (2) The will is primal; or, in other words, conscious life is always oriented towards something to be secured or avoided immediately or ultimately.

If, with this conception in mind, we turn to Religion, we shall understand it to be compounded of will, thought, and feeling, bearing to each other the relation which belongs to them in every department of life. And it will, moreover, be clear that a purpose or an ideal, *i.e.* something to be attained or maintained, must always be at the root of it. The outcome of the application of current psychological teaching to religious life is, then, to lead us to regard Religion as a particular kind of activity, as a mode or type of behaviour, and to make it as impossible for us to identify it with a particular emotion or with a particular belief, as it would be to identify, let us say, family life with

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affection, or to define trade as 'belief in the productivity of exchange'; or commerce as 'greed touched with a feeling of dependence upon society.' And yet this last definition is no less informing and adequate than the far-famed formula of Matthew Arnold, which I forbear to repeat. We shall, however, have to remember that Religion is multiform, and that certain ideas, emotions, and purposes appear in it prominently at certain moments, and other ideas, emotions, and purposes at other times. But neither prominence nor predominance is synonymous with 'essence' or with 'vital element.'

I do not intend, at this stage of our inquiry, to offer a complete definition of Religion. But I must guard against a possible misinterpretation. In speaking of Religion as an activity, or as a type of behaviour, I would not be understood to exclude from it whatever does not express itself in overt acts, in rites of propitiation, submission, or adoration. For, just as man's relations with his fellow-men are not all directly expressed, or expressible, in actions, so his relations with gods, or their impersonal substitutes, may not have any visible form; they may remain purely subjective and none the less exercise a definite guiding and inspiring influence over his life.

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The adjectives *passive* and *active* might be used to separate amorphous from organised Religion, *i.e.* the feeling-attitude from the behaviour. 'Passive,' used in this connection, would mean simply that the person does not actively seek those advantages the gods might procure, but is content to be acted upon by them.

*Unorganised religiosity* must be, it seems, the necessary precursor of organised Religion; it is its larval stage. But it does not by any means disappear from society when a system of definite relations with gods, or with impersonal sources of religious inspiration, has been developed. In all societies there is always a large number of people who live in the limbo of organised Religion. They are open to the influence of religious agents, in which they believe more or less cold-heartedly, without ever entering into definite and fixed relations with them.

## CHAPTER II

### THREE TYPES OF BEHAVIOUR DIFFERENTIATED

IN his dealings with the different kinds of objects or forces with which he is, or thinks himself, in relation, man has developed three distinct types of behaviour. A concrete illustration will bring them before us more forcibly than an abstract characterisation. A stoker in the hold of a ship, throwing coal into the furnace, represents one of them. His purpose is to produce propelling energy. The amount of coal he shovels in, together with the air-draught, the condition of the boiler and other factors of the same sort, determine, as he understands the matter, the velocity of the ship. The same man, playing cards of an evening, and having lost uninterruptedly for a long time, might get up and walk round the table backwards in order to change his luck. He would then illustrate a second mode of behaviour. If a storm threatens to sink the ship, our stoker might be seen falling



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on his knees, lifting his hands to heaven, and addressing in passionate words an invisible being. These are the three differentiated kinds of responses he has learned to make, the three ways by which he endeavours to make use of the forces about him in his struggle for the preservation and the enrichment of life. We may designate them as—

1. The mechanical behaviour.
2. The coercitive behaviour, or Magic.
3. The anthropopathic behaviour, which includes Religion.

The mechanical behaviour differs from the anthropopathic by the absence of any reference to personal beings. In the sphere in which it obtains, threats and presents are equally ineffective. It implies instead the practical—not the theoretical—recognition of a fairly definite and constant quantitative relation between cause and effect. If science is to be provided with an ancestor, and only with one, it should be this first type of behaviour rather than Magic. For, the moment the existence of the fixed quantitative relations, implicitly acknowledged in the first type of behaviour, is explicitly recognised, science is born. Magic separates itself, on the one hand, from the mechanical behaviour by the

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absence of implied quantitative relations, and, on the other hand, from anthropopathic behaviour by the failure to use means of personal influence; punishment and reward are just as foreign to Magic as to mechanical behaviour. As to the anthropopathic type of activity, it includes the ordinary relations of men with men as well as those with gods. One's frame of mind and behaviour when dealing with a human person, especially if exalted far above us, resembles Religion so closely that it is proper to place them in the same class.

Mechanical behaviour and Religion are, obviously, by far the most common and important modes of activity among civilised peoples, whereas in primitive culture the coercitive behaviour (Magic) is everywhere in evidence and Religion may be practically unknown. As one ascends from the lowest stages of culture, Magic gradually loses official recognition. Among us, though it leads only a surreptitious existence, it has by no means lost all influence. The list of magical superstitions that have retained a hold among us would be found tediously long. A numerous class of them includes the gambler's methods of securing luck. So-called 'religious' practices may really be magical. The cross, the rosary,

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relics, and other accessories of Religion, acquire in the mind of many Christians a power of the coercitive type; that is, for instance, the case when the sign of the cross, of itself, without the mediation of God or Saint, is felt to have power; or when 'saying one's beads' is held to possess a curative virtue of the kind ascribed to sacred relics by the superstitious. Even when the symbolism of the sign of the cross, and the meaning of the *Ave Maria* are realised, it happens not infrequently that signing oneself and saying one's beads are regarded as acting upon the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ, or God, in the manner of an incantation, *i.e.* magically.

It has been the habit of most students of the origin of Religion to concern themselves exclusively with the origin of the god-idea, as if belief in the existence of gods was identical with Religion. They have ignored its other essential components: the motives or desires and the feelings, as well as the means by which, in Religion, the gratification of desire is sought. But the limitation of the problem of origin to that of the god-idea is not entirely amiss. For there are neither specifically religious motives, nor specifically religious feelings. Any and every

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human need and longing may, at some stage or other, become a spring of Religion, and conversely the feelings and emotions met with in any form of Religion appear also in non-religious experience. As to the practical means of securing the favour of the gods, it is agreed that they were at the beginning essentially the same as those men were already in the habit of using in their relations with their fellow-men. It is the Agent or the Power with which man thinks himself in relation, and through whom he endeavours to secure the gratification of his desires, which alone is distinctive of religious life. And so the origin of the idea of gods, though not identical with the origin of Religion, is at any rate its central problem.

In the preceding remarks, as also in practically all writings on the origin of Religion, it is assumed that the god-concept precedes, in the mind of man, the establishment of Religion. This opinion is, as we shall see, the correct one. But it cannot be taken as a matter of course. Actions may become established in other ways. Our first problem is to discover how Religion arose, and what psychological capacities and conceptions it implies.

A comparative study of the three modes of

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behaviour is, after all, the shortest way of gaining a satisfactory understanding of the origin of Religion.

*What are the abstract conceptions necessary to the establishment of the three modes of behaviour?*—There is usually little difficulty in determining what end any particular action is intended to secure. It is quite otherwise if one wishes to ascertain the nature of the power from which the desired effect is supposed to proceed. The philosopher, suffering from the illusion to which his class is subject, is in danger of imagining the presence of highly abstract notions where much simpler mental processes actually take place. A comparatively easy way of getting oneself disentangled from these high-flown interpretations and of ascertaining what is the intellectual minimum really involved in these types of behaviour, is to examine them in the least developed men known to us, or, better still—if they are to be found there—among animals. Let us accordingly turn for a moment to animal behaviour with the intention of determining what ideas of power, or of agency, are involved in their modes of action, and thus take a preliminary step towards the solution of our problem.

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Apes, dogs, beavers, in fact all the higher animals, show by their behaviour a 'working understanding' of the more common physical forces. They estimate weight, resistance, heat, distance, etc., and adapt their actions more or less exactly to these factors when climbing, swinging at the end of boughs, breaking, carrying, etc. I remember observing a chimpanzee trying to recover a stick which had fallen through the bars of his cage and rolled beyond the reach of his arm. He looked around, walked deliberately to the corner of the cage, picked up a piece of burlap, and threw the end of it over the stick. Then, pulling gently, he made the stick roll until near enough for him to get hold of it with his hand. This ape dealt successfully with physical forces. Towards animals and men, animal behaviour is quite different. A dog will beg from a man; he will not beg from a ham suspended out of his reach. Towards animals and men, animal behaviour is similar to that of men when dealing with invisible anthropopathic beings.

One may well believe that the inner experiences of animals differ in these modes of behaviour as much as their external movements. The feelings and emotions which appear in a



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dog's intercourse with his master are of the same species, if not of the same variety, as those felt by man when he deals with his fellow-men and with superhuman beings. Certain highly gifted animals feel blame and approbation, independently of physical punishment or reward, and attach themselves to their masters with a devoted affection possessing all the marks of altruism. The higher animals do, then, without any doubt, practise both the mechanical and the anthropopathic types of behaviour, but they exercise the latter only towards *actually present* persons or animals. We shall have to consider subsequently the significant psychological difference to which this fact points.

But, is there no trace in animal life of the coercitive behaviour? I know of none, though some perplexity might be caused by certain reactions animals learn under the tuition of man. What shall be said, for instance, of a dog who has learned to raise its forepaws when he wishes to be liberated from confinement under circumstances making the person causing the door to open invisible to him? Is this magical behaviour? There is certainly no quantitative nor any qualitative relation between lifting up the forepaws and the opening of a door, neither

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is there any visible continuity between cause and effect. That the dog's action is not determined, in this instance, in the same way as that of a magician, appears when it is observed that whereas the latter would perform the same magical rite in a great variety of external circumstances, the dog will seek liberation by lifting its paws only when in the particular cage in which he has learned the trick, or in one very much like it.<sup>1</sup> But more about this presently. It is not to be overlooked that without the interference of man, the dog would never have learned to perform this quasi-magical trick. This illustration serves, if no other purpose, at least to indicate how apparently slight is the impediment which prevents the higher animals from setting up a magical art.

It may be a matter for astonishment that two complicated and effective modes of reaction are

<sup>1</sup> H. B. Davis has this to say on the power of generalisation of the raccoon, a very intelligent animal: 'When an animal [raccoon] is forced to approach a new fastening from a new direction, it is often as much bothered by it as by a new fastening. Nevertheless, in course of time the animals seem to reach a sort of generalised manner of procedure which enables them to deal more promptly with any new fastening (not too different from others of their experience).' 'The Raccoon: A Study in Animal Intelligence,' *Amer. Jr. of Psy.*, Oct. 1907, p. 486.

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arrived at by animals in the absence of abstract ideas about forces. Yet so it is; before any speculation on power, before any induction or deduction, before any abstract notion of the nature of spirit and matter, animals have learned to deal quite well with what we call physical and personal forces. How did they do it? The study under experimental conditions of the establishment of new reactions in animals reveals the process very clearly. Imagine a cat shut up in a cage, the door of which can be opened by pressing down a latch. When weary of confinement the cat begins to claw, pull, and bite, here, there, and everywhere. After half an hour, or an hour of this purposive, but unreasoned, activity, he chances to put his paw upon the latch and escapes. If again put into the cage, he does not seem to know any better than before how to proceed. Yet something has been gained by the first experience. For now he directs his clawing, pulling, and biting more frequently towards the part of the cage occupied by the latch. Because of this improvement he finds himself released sooner than the first time. The repetition of the experiment shows the cat learning to bring his movements to bear more and more exclusively upon the door or its immediate

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surroundings. Ultimately he will have learned to make just the necessary movement and no other. In this gradual exclusion of useless movements, the cat is guided entirely by results. The psycho-physiological endowment required for acquisitions of this kind involves no abstract ideas but only (1) the desire to escape; (2) the impulse and ability to perform the various movements we have named; (3) an indefinite remembrance of the position occupied when success was achieved, combined with a tendency to repeat the same movements when in the same situation.

The method illustrated above by which animals learn to deal with forces in the midst of which they live has a much wider range of application in human existence than is generally supposed. Man's fundamental mode of learning is also the unreflective, experimental, one in which frequent blind attempts and chance successes slowly lead to the elimination of ineffective movements. Would you convince yourself of the vastly exaggerated rôle ascribed to abstract ideas and to logical processes in ordinary human behaviour, inquire how 'power' is conceived of by those who use it. What is in the mind of the stoker when he thinks of the power of coal? What in the

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mind of the gambler when he tries to coerce fate? What in the mind of the necromancer when he summons the shades of spirits? Nothing definite beyond a knowledge of what is to be done in order to secure the desired results and the anticipation of these results themselves. The stoker thinks of what he sees and feels: the coal, in burning, gives heat; the heat makes the water boil; the steam pushes the piston-rod, and so forth. Each one of the successive links in the chain is vaguely thought of by him as striving to bring about the following one. That is how he understands the coal-power. And what does the ordinary person know, for instance, about electricity? Simply what is to be done in order to start the dynamo, light the lamp, switch the current, and what the effect will be in each case, nothing more. The superstitious person, whether belonging to a primitive tribe or to the Anglo-Saxon civilisation of the twentieth century, understands in no other than this practical way the forces he deals with. I remember the delight shown by an elderly lady when a brood of swallows fell down our sitting-room chimney. 'It will bring luck to the household,' said she. I did my best, patiently and in several ways, to ascertain the sort of notion the



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lady had regarding the nature of the power that was to bring about the fortunate events predicted, and also to discover her idea of the connection existing between the fall of the swallows and the exertion of the 'power' in our behalf. I had to come to the conclusion that there was no idea whatsoever in her mind beyond those expressed by 'swallows-down-the-chimney' and 'happy-events-coming.' These two ideas were in her mind directly associated. When I declared my inability to see the causal connection between the two, she complained of my abnormal critical sense! Nothing more than the immediate association of an antecedent with its consequent need be looked for in the mind of most civilised, superstitious persons, and, of course, nothing more in the mind of a savage. That is sufficient for practical purposes.

The words 'matter' and 'spirit' wield a very considerable influence among us; what do they mean to most of those who use them? Physical science ascribes either extension alone, or extension and weight, to physical substances. Non-material forces are, then, according to science, both spaceless and weightless. I will venture to affirm that not one educated person in a thousand is acquainted with this distinction.



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Most of the few who have known it have forgotten it. So that the words 'matter' and 'spirit' mean different things to the philosopher and to the layman. In the popular mind, if spirits are not perceptible it is because the senses are not sufficiently acute. Spirits are here or there, diffused over wide areas or concentrated in narrow spaces. The average Christian, whatever he may say to the contrary, is, theoretically speaking, a materialist, and, I might add, a polytheist. Whatever matter and spirit mean to him, and they certainly have a substantial meaning, the distinction made by the philosopher is for him non-existent. The following facts may be of some interest in this connection. A few years ago, in a conversation with a shop-clerk, I happened to mention a lead coffin made hermetic with solder. He was shocked, and objected to a dead body being shut up in a coffin of that description because it prevented the escape of the soul. This man had had an ordinary grammar-school education. Here are two quotations taken from answers of American College students to questions requesting a description of their idea of God. It should be added that the questions were given only to classes which had not yet taken up, or were just begin-

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ning the study of philosophy. 'God, to me, is a being of flesh and blood, for without this form he would seem unnatural and unsympathetic as our leader.' (Female, twenty years old.)—'I think of God as real, actual flesh and blood and bones, something we shall all see with our eyes some day.' (Male, twenty-one years old.) Together with these, and from the same classes of students, came a great number of very different answers; for instance this, 'God is an impersonal being. . . . I think of him as the embodiment of natural laws.' Descartes' conception may serve as a point of comparison: 'What the soul itself was, I either did not stay to consider, or, if I did, I imagined that it was something extremely rare and subtle, like wind or flame, or ether, spread through my grosser parts.'<sup>1</sup>

If the philosophical distinction between matter and spirit is not ordinarily made, these terms express none the less a very definite practical meaning of prime importance: they mark the difference between forces that are not responsive to psychic influences (desire and emotion, ethical and æsthetic considerations) and those that are.

The trial-and-error method which serves to

<sup>1</sup> *Meditationes*, ii. p. 10, Amsterdam, 1678.

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establish the efficient modes of behaviour observed in animals is so far reaching in its possibilities that one might be tempted to regard it as accounting for the existence of Magic and of Religion. Were this theory tenable, the origin of the three modes of human behaviour would have been brought back to one method of learning, the unreasoning, trial-and-error method. But even a superficial consideration discovers insuperable obstacles in the way of this enticingly simple explanation, and compels the admission that magical art and Religion involve the operation of mental powers not required for the establishment of the mechanical, and of the non-religious anthropathic behaviours.

The first of the two differences I intend to bring out, is that if a particular action is to be learned by an animal, the gratification of the actuating desire must follow immediately, or nearly so, upon the performance of the successful act, and be frequently repeated at short intervals; whereas in man, as far as Magic and Religion are concerned, the results may follow quite irregularly upon the performance, often only long after, and, not infrequently, not at all. Had not the door opened every time the cat pressed the latch, but, let us say, only once every ten times, or, if every time,

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one week after the movement, he would never have learned to make his escape. No more would he have acquired the trick, had he not been placed in the cage repeatedly and at short intervals. An interesting instance of the gradual undoing of a habit in consequence of the absence of the sensory results for the sake and under the guidance of which the action had been learned, is reported by Lloyd Morgan.<sup>1</sup> He had brought up in his study a brood of ducks. They had had a bath every morning in a tin tray. After a while, the tray was placed empty in its accustomed place. The ducks got into it and went through all their ordinary ablutions. The next day, they again enjoyed the missing water, but not as long as on the first day. On the third day they gave up the useless practice of bathing in an empty tray.

In three days ducklings eliminate a habit which has become useless, whereas generations after generations of men have gone through innumerable, time-wasting, often costly and painful ceremonies for results rarely secured, and, as we think, never directly secured by the magical or the religious ceremonies themselves. There is here a curious

<sup>1</sup> C. Lloyd Morgan, *Introduction to Comparative Psychology* (The Contemporary Science Series, 1894), p. 89.

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point of psychology: animals establish habits under the guidance of immediate results while man develops the magical art and Religion *despite* the usual absence of the results sought after. The very possibility of deceiving himself reveals the superiority of man over animals, for self-deception requires a degree of independence from sense-observation, a capacity of constructive imagination, a susceptibility to auto-suggestion, not to be found in animals. That the first glimmer of these capacities should have plunged man in the darkness of primitive Magic and Religion, and made him the ridiculous fool he appears to be by the side of the matter-of-fact, intelligent animal is, however, a very striking and singular fact.

If the constant and immediate appearance of the desired results does not seem necessary to the establishment of Magic and Religion, it should not be thought, however, that these arts are altogether useless. On the contrary, they are, even independently of the results at which they aim, of a most substantial value to the cause of individual and social development. Let it be said first, concerning the expected results, that they happen more frequently, perhaps, than I may have seemed to imply. When, for instance, the rain ceremonies are performed during a spell

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of dry weather, success, more or less distant, always crowns the efforts of the magicians: the rain does come and the earth does bring forth its fruits. The ceremonies for the healing of disease are often followed by the recovery of the patient, however absurd the treatment may have been. One should not forget, in this connection, the considerable effect of suggestion upon the credulous savage. Many cures are, no doubt, performed in this manner by the medicine-man. Davenport, speaking of tribes of Puget Sound, says: 'Their cure for disease consists in the members of the cult shaking in a circle about a sick person, dressed in ceremonial costume. The religious practitioner waves a cloth in front of the patient, with a gentle fanning motion, and, blowing at the same time, proceeds to drive the disease out of the body, beginning at the feet and working upward. The assistant stands ready to seize the disease with his cloth when it is driven out of the head! And they are able to boast of many real cures.'<sup>1</sup> A psychologist is not inclined to doubt the report of Curr, that among the aborigines of Victoria persons who knew themselves to have been devoted to destruc-

<sup>1</sup> F. M. Davenport, *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals*, Macmillan (1905), p. 36; quoted from the Fourteenth Annual Report of the [Amer.] Bureau of Ethnology, p. 761.



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tion with magical ceremonies have pined away and died,<sup>1</sup> nor that of Howitt, who, alluding to the habit of the medicine-men of certain tribes to knock a man insensible in order to remove the kidney fat for magical purposes, writes, 'In the Kurnai tribe men have died believing themselves to have been deprived of their fat.'<sup>2</sup>

But the intended results form only a part, and that perhaps not the most important, of the gains to be credited to the practice of Magic and of Religion. The most noteworthy of these unsought by-products are:—(1) The gratification of the lust for power. The Magician and the Priest are mediators between superior, mysterious powers and their fellow-men. The sense of mastery over, or communion with, these powers, and the respect and fear with which Magicians and Priests are regarded, are, of themselves, almost sufficient to keep up these practices. (2) Both these modes of behaviour, but especially Magic, appeal to the gambling instinct. All men crave excitement; the savage is no exception. In the daring game in which the rain-maker or the

<sup>1</sup> E. M. Curr, *The Australian Race*, iii. p. 547, as quoted by Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 2nd ed., i. p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Howitt, *The Native Races of South-East Australia* (1904), p. 373.

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disease-healer engages, the high tension of the gambling-table is, to a certain extent, present. (3) Less obvious, perhaps, than the preceding advantages, but not less valuable, is the general mental stimulation induced by Magic and Religion. Magic is the great social play of the savage. If animal plays serve a highly valuable purpose in affording practice in sense-observation and motor-co-ordination, Magic makes its chief call upon the imagination; in this consists one of its most far-reaching values. It becomes a training for the achievement of those higher mental syntheses requiring the momentary disregard of the actual sense-impressions, from which it is so difficult to liberate oneself, in behalf of the accumulated experience of a whole life.

The second objection to the assumption that the trial-and-error method could have led to the establishment of magical and religious habits arises from the inability of animals to act towards unperceived objects as if they were actually present. A dog never welcomes by gambols or licks the hand of an absent friend, while Religion, and at times Magic, show primitive man in more or less systematic relations with powers he has never sensed. When the Shaman draws lines upon the sand, describes various

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curves with his arms, utters sundry incantations, he does not address a power he perceives, nor even one he has really seen, although he may believe that he, or some one else, has seen it. That animals are moved to action by memories of past perceptions, is, of course, not open to doubt. Their whole life is a long testimony to that ability. Any one will recall instances of chains of concerted actions indicating clearly, on the part of some one of the higher animals, domesticated or wild, the anticipation of a particular person, object, or event. What they never do, is to behave as if the remembered object was really present, though not sensed. H. Spencer, discussing adversely A. Comte's opinion that fetichistic conceptions are formed by the higher animals, relates the following observation concerning a retriever who had learned for herself to perform 'an act of propitiation.' She had associated the fetching of game with the pleasure of the person to whom she brought it, and so, 'after wagging her tail and grinning, she would perform this act of propitiation as nearly as practicable in the absence of a dead bird. Seeking about, she would pick up a dead leaf, a bit of paper, a twig, or other small object, and would bring it with renewed manifestations of friendliness. Some

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kindred state of mind it is which, I believe, prompts the savage to certain fetichistic observances.'<sup>1</sup> So far the dog could go, but she could not have imagined the presence of an unseen being and behaved towards him in the same manner. Another significant point is that the absent objects towards which animals may direct their actions are always, so far as one may judge, identical with those actually sensed by them at some time, *i.e.* their behaviour never shows that they have transformed, imaginatively, objects with which their senses have made them familiar. Whereas man can not only believe in the presence of unseen objects, but he can also imagine beings never actually sensed by him, and behave towards them according to the traits and capacities with which he has endowed them.

There are observations on record which compel the qualification of the assertion, I may have seemed to make in the preceding paragraph, of a clean break between man and animals. Certain dogs are thrown into paroxysms of fear by peals of thunder, and run into hiding. Darwin relates how his dog, 'full grown and very sensible,' growled fiercely and barked whenever an open

<sup>1</sup> *Principles of Sociology* (3rd edition, 1885), i. Appendix A, p. 788.

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parasol standing at some distance was moved by a slight breeze. He is of the opinion that the dog 'must have reasoned to himself, in a rapid and unconscious manner, that movement without any apparent cause indicated the presence of some strange living agent, and that no stranger had a right to be on his territory.'<sup>1</sup> Romanes, in a short and interesting paper entitled 'Fetichism in Animals,'<sup>2</sup> after reporting the preceding illustration, relates this observation touching a remarkably 'intelligent,' 'pugnacious,' and 'courageous' dog. 'The terrier [Skye] in question, like many other dogs, used to play with dry bones, by tossing them in the air, throwing them to a distance, and generally giving them the appearance of animation, in order to give himself the ideal pleasure of worrying them. On one occasion, therefore, I tied a long and fine thread to a dry bone, and gave him the latter to play with. After he had tossed it about for a short time, I took an opportunity, when it had fallen at a distance from him, and while he was following it up, of gently drawing it away from him by means of the long and invisible thread. Instantly his whole demeanour changed.

<sup>1</sup> *The Descent of Man*, 2nd ed., i. p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> *Nature*, xvii. (1877-78), pp. 168-169. Comp. Lloyd Morgan, *Introd. to Comparative Psychology*, p. 92 ff.

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The bone which he had previously pretended to be alive, now began to look as if it really were alive, and his astonishment knew no bounds. He first approached it with nervous caution as Mr. Spencer describes, but as the slow receding motion continued, and he became quite certain that the movement could not be accounted for by any residuum of the force which he had himself communicated, his astonishment developed into dread, and he ran to conceal himself under some articles of furniture, there to behold at a distance the uncanny spectacle of a dry bone coming to life.' Certain instances of instinctive fear of harmless things may help to interpret the preceding observations. G. Stanley Hall mentions a little girl who would scream when she saw feathers floating through the air. To keep another child in a room, it was sufficient to place a feather in the keyhole.<sup>1</sup>

Shall we hold that these animals interpreted the unusual experiences reported above as the work of hidden beings of the kind known to them, or shall we agree rather with Lloyd Morgan, Romanes, Spencer, and others, in thinking that their behaviour indicated merely surprise, astonishment, and fear at the unexpected movements of familiar objects? That explanation is probably

<sup>1</sup> A Study in Fears, *Am. Jour. of Psy.* (1897), viii. p. 166.



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sufficient. The failure of an object to fit in with the psycho-physiological attitude of expectation which past experience has taught us to assume brings about the sudden disturbance called surprise, astonishment, or fear. It is in substance what would happen to any person if, on opening his bed in the dark, his hands came in contact with some object concealed in it. Personalisation of the unexpected object is not necessary to cause fright. And yet, who shall say that in none of these instances is there anything corresponding to the anthropomorphic interpretation of natural event so common among men of low culture? Does not the growling of Darwin's dog indicate as much? It would seem to me an unjustifiably dogmatic assertion to affirm that no animal can think of thunder as caused by a being like those with which his senses have made him familiar. Were he to do so, he would do as the savage who projects his ordinary notion of animated beings behind inanimate phenomena. Creative imagination is not any more required for such an interpretation than for the belief in survival after death when it is suggested by apparitions in dreams or trances. It is quite in point, at any rate, to affirm that man and beasts are much nearer to each other, regarding the possibility of

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interpreting animistically certain striking natural events, than most people are willing to admit.

The most significant difference between men and animals is not found in the fact that animals may be unable to interpret animistically certain striking natural phenomena—an opinion open to question—but in their inability to *fix* by means of communicable signs any fleeting animistic interpretation which might chance to cross their mind. Without the advantage conferred by speech, upon even the lowest savages, to hold, clarify, keep alive, and bring to fruition impressions of this evanescent nature, I do not see how a stable belief in animism could have been established. The decisive rôle played by language appears forcibly when one considers the part it takes in introducing dream experiences into waking life. The baffling evanescence of dreams caught sight of on awakening is familiar to every one. Unless one succeeds in putting them in linguistic form they are soon completely lost; verbal expression makes them part and parcel of our mental possessions.

The mental differences between man and the higher animals to which the presence of Magic and Religion is to be referred, are not in themselves startling, however considerable their con-

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sequences may have been. Psychological analysis leaves absolutely no standing ground to those who insist upon interpreting the advent of Religion as the manifestation of essentially new kinds of powers, of the birth of a 'spiritual life,' for instance. We hope to have made clear that the use of this term in this connection constitutes a misrepresentation of the facts.

## CHAPTER III

### ORIGIN OF THE IDEAS OF GHOSTS, NATURE-BEINGS AND GODS

EVERY savage tribe known to us has already passed beyond the naturistic stage of development. The living savages believe in ghosts, in spirits, and all of them, perhaps, also in particular spirits elevated to the dignity of gods. Whence these ideas of unseen personal beings? They may be traced to four independent sources.

(1) *States of temporary loss of consciousness—trances, swoons, sleep, etc.*—seem in themselves sufficient to suggest to ignorant observers the existence of ‘doubles,’ *i.e.* of beings dwelling within the body, animating it, and able to absent themselves from it for a time or permanently. These alleged beings have been called ‘ghosts’ or ‘souls.’ The belief in a second life of the dead would also spring easily enough from these observations.

(2) *Apparitions in sleep, in the hallucinations*

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*of fever, of insanity, etc.*, of persons still living or dead, seem also sufficient to lead to a belief in ghosts and in survival after death.

These two distinct classes of facts have no doubt co-operated in the production of the belief in ghosts, so that I shall refer to them in the sequel as the double origin of the ghost-belief. Echos, and reflections in water and in polished surfaces may have played a subsidiary rôle in establishing, or confirming, the belief in ghosts and in spirits.

(3) When discussing animal behaviour, we saw reasons to admit that a fleeting personification of objects moving in an unusual way might be within the mental possibilities of the higher animals. The third independent source of belief in unseen personal agents is *the spontaneous personification of striking natural phenomena, storms, tornadoes, thunder, sudden spring-vegetation, etc.* The report of Tanner<sup>1</sup> that one night Picheto (a North American Chief), becoming much alarmed at the violence of a storm, got up, offered some tobacco to the thunder and entreated it to stop, should not excite surprise even though it should refer to

<sup>1</sup> Lord Avebury, *On the Origin of Civilisation* (3rd edition, 1875), p. 212.

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the lowest savage. There is, of course, a long way between the sudden, temporary, and isolated personification of a natural phenomenon and the stable and generalised belief in the existence of personal agents behind visible nature. What we mean to assert here is merely that the systematised belief can have arisen out of the impulsive and occasional personification of awe-striking and frightening spectacles.

(4) Many persons have observed with surprise the apparition in young children of the problem of creation. A child notices a curiously-shaped stone, and asks who made it. He is told that it was formed in the stream by the water. Then, suddenly, he throws out, in quick succession, questions that are as much exclamations of astonishment as queries, 'Who made the stream, who the mountain, who the earth?' *The necessity of a Maker is, no doubt, borne in upon the savage at a very early time, not upon every member of a tribe, but upon some peculiarly gifted individual, who imparts to his fellows the awe-striking idea of a mysterious, all-powerful Creator. The form under which the Creator is imagined is, of course, derived from the beings with which his senses have made the savage familiar.*



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In what chronological order did the three kinds of unseen beings appear? Which was first: ghosts, nature-beings, or creator? Our present knowledge does not provide an answer to this query. But this one may venture to affirm: they need not have appeared in the same order everywhere. It is conceivable that among certain groups of men the idea of a creator first attained clearness and influence, while elsewhere the idea of ghosts implanted itself before the others.

A question of greater importance to the student of the origin of Religion is that of the lineage of the first god or gods, *i.e.* of the first unseen, personal agents with whom men entered into relations definite and influential enough to deserve the name Religion. Are they descended from ghosts, or are they nature-beings, or creators? I say, 'descended' from ghosts, for ghosts have not, originally, all the qualities required of a divinity. They are at first hardly greater than men, though somewhat different. They must be magnified and differentiated from human beings if they are to generate the religious attitude. A comparison of the double-source of the ghost-belief with the source of the belief in nature-beings suggests the following remarks.

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Phenomena belonging to classes one and two necessarily lead to a belief in unseen *man-like* beings. The familiar relation of ghosts with the tribe, and also the great number of them, offer a definite resistance to the process of deification. It is otherwise with the personified nature-powers, for they are not necessarily, like ghosts, mere dead men in another life. In conceiving of an agent animating nature, the imagination is not limited to the thought of a particular human being, not even of a human being at all. The thunder might be the voice of some monstrous animal. The surpassing variety, the magnitude and magnificence of nature, stimulate the imagination into more original activity than the apparitions of men and women in dreams or in trances. For these reasons, if the choice was between ghosts and nature-beings, it would be advisable to favour the hypothesis that the first gods were derived from the spontaneous personification of striking natural events. But the idea of a creator must take precedence of ghosts and nature-beings in the making of Religion, for a world-creator possesses from the first the greatness necessary to the object of a cult, and the creature who recognises a creator can hardly fail to feel his relationship to him.

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A Maker cannot, moreover, be an enemy to those who issue from him, but must, it seems, appear as the Great Ancestor, benevolently inclined towards his offspring. Incomparable greatness, creative power, benevolence, are as many attributes favourable to the appearance of a Religion in the high sense which, as we shall see, W. Robertson Smith gives to the word.

The order in which appeared the three kinds of unseen agents is of considerable importance, for if, for instance, the ghost-belief was first, it seems unavoidable that ghosts should have been projected into natural objects and used to explain natural phenomena. It is a task for the historian of Religion to trace the rise of the idea of God in its several possible sources, and to indicate in each particular case the contribution of each source to the making of the earliest gods.

*Belief in the existence of unseen, anthropopathic beings is not Religion.* It is only when man enters into relation with them that Religion comes into existence. The passage from the animistic interpretation of nature, or from the mere belief in ghosts, or in a creator, to Active Religion is not to be taken as a matter of course, for it may require on the one hand, as we have said,

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a transformation of the man-like or animal-like unseen beings, such as will make entering into relation with them possible and worth while, and, on the other, the invention of ways and means to that end, or, at least, the adaptation of old habits of behaviour to the requirements of the new relation. The slowness with which our modern ritual has been envolved should be sufficient to undeceive any one inclined to think that the establishment of the initial religious rites presented no difficulty.

That a belief in ghosts may coincide with only a pre-religious stage of culture is not a mere supposition. There are tribes in South-East Australia among which it is customary to make fires in the graves, and to place in them water, food, and weapons. Yet we are told that these people have no system of propitiation or of worship. It appears probable that in certain instances of this sort, the only motive of action is benevolence. They wish the ghost to be able to warm himself, eat, drink, and defend himself against enemies. At times, however, the promptings of fear are discernible, as, for instance, when the legs of the corpse are broken in order that he may not roam at night. It seems that originally ghosts are not endowed with sufficient mischievous or benevolent

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power to cause the appearance and the organisation of propitiatory reactions. But even when some particular ghost or spirit has been fabled into awe-striking magnitude, systematic worship is not necessarily present. How far the deification process can go without bringing with it active relations, is well shown in the case of the 'Father' of the tribes of South-East Australia. Different tribes call him by different names, *Daramulun*, *Baiame*, etc. Howitt tells us that Daramulun is an anthropomorphic, supernatural being who used to dwell upon the earth, but now lives in a land beyond the sky. He can make himself visible, and then appears in the form of an old man of the Australian race. 'He is imagined as the ideal of those qualities which are, according to their standard, virtues worthy of being imitated. Such would be a man who is skilful in the use of weapons of offence and defence, all-powerful in magic, but generous and liberal to his people; who does no injury nor violence to any one, yet treats with severity any breaches of custom or of morality. Such is, according to my knowledge of the Australian tribes, their ideal of the Head-man, and naturally it is that of the Biamban, the master of the sky-country.' Now, despite their

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belief in this definite, powerful, and benevolent Father, 'there is not any worship of him'; but 'the dances round the figure of clay and the invoking of his name by the medicine-men, certainly might have led up to it.'<sup>1</sup> For my part, I see here an instance of what I have called *Passive Religion*. The point of special interest to us is that nothing more than these simplest of rites co-exists with the belief in a being so definite and elevated so high above ordinary spirits and above man as is this All-Father of the Australians.

It seems highly probable that for generations the relations maintained with ghosts, nature-beings, and creators, by primitive man were too occasional and unofficial to permit of our regarding them as anything more than steps preliminary to the formation of Positive Religion.

Rites and ceremonies serve, in addition to their ostensible purpose, to complete the work of fixation begun by language. It is only when a belief has become embodied in a system of actions that it has attained the full measure of reality and durability of which it is capable.

<sup>1</sup> *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, pp. 500, 506-508.



## CHAPTER IV

### MAGIC AND RELIGION

IN the preceding section, I have compared animal with human behaviour in an attempt to single out the psychological traits whose presence in man accounts for his possession of Religion and of Magic. I must now complete the characterisation and the account of the origin of these two higher types of behaviour.

The relation obtaining between Magic and Religion has been variously understood. Most authorities hold that Magic preceded Religion, and that they are in some way genetically related. In the following pages we shall argue in support of two opinions: (1) the primary forms of Magic probably antedated Religion; (2) whether Magic antedated Religion or not, Religion arose independently of Magic; they are different in principle and independent in origin.

But the word Magic includes an almost endless number of practices so far quite inadequately

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classified. We cannot go on without first marking out at least its more prominent groups. And since the common bond of these practices is neither a common purpose (Magic serves to gratify every kind of desire), nor a common method (the magician's methods are literally numberless), but the non-personal nature of the power pressed into service, we shall make use of this last element as a means of classification. Three groups are thus obtained.

**Magic classified.**—*Class 1* is characterised by the absence of any idea of a power belonging to the operator or his instrument and passing from either one of them to the object of the magical art. To this class belong many instances of so-called sympathetic Magic;<sup>1</sup> a good many of the taboo customs; most charms; the casting of lots, when a spirit or god is not supposed to guide the cast; most modern superstitions, those, for instance, regarding Friday, the number thirteen, horse-shoes, planting when the tide is coming in. In these instances the effect is thought of

<sup>1</sup> Hang a root of vervain around the neck in order to cause the disappearance of a tumour: as the plant dries up, so will the tumour. If the fish do not appear in due season, make one of wood and put it into the water. Keep the arrow that has wounded a friend in a cool place that the wound may not become inflamed.

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as following upon the alleged cause, without the mediation of a force conceived as passing, let us say, from the warm arrow to the wound and irritating it. The idea of power is reduced here to its least possible complexity.

*Class 2.* A power, not itself personal, is supposed to belong to the magician, to his instrument, or to particular substances, and to pass into, or act upon, the object. Howitt relates how some native Australians begged him not to carry in a bag containing quartz crystals a tooth, extracted at an initiation ceremony. They thought that if he did so, the evil power of the crystals would enter the tooth and so injure the body to which it had belonged.<sup>1</sup> The potency of many charms is of this nature, while others have a fetichistic significance, *i.e.* they involve the action of spirits, and so do not belong to this class. Rubbing oneself with, or eating the fat, or another portion, of a brave and strong man in order to make oneself courageous and powerful, belongs also to this second class, together with most instances of contagion-magic. So does, usually, the power defined in the following passage and the similar powers believed in and used in other than

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, xiii. (1884), p. 456, quoted by Frazer.

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Melanesian populations: 'That invisible power which is believed by the natives to cause all such effects as transcend their conception of the regular course of nature, and to reside in spiritual beings, whether in the spiritual part of living men or in the ghosts of the dead, being imparted to them, to their names and to various things that belong to them, such as stones, snakes, and indeed objects of all sorts, is that generally known as *mana*. . . . No man, however, has this power of his own; all that he does is done by the aid of personal beings, ghosts or spirits; he cannot be said, as a spirit can, to be *mana* himself . . . he can be said to have *mana*.'<sup>1</sup>

*Class 3.* Perhaps a special class should be made of the cases in which the magician feels as if his will-effort was the efficient factor. This is often true of spells, of incantations, and of solemn curses. A man addressing the magical spear, saying, 'Go straight, go straight and kill him,' feels no doubt that, somehow, by the words in which quivers his whole soul he directs the spear on its errand of death.

Though Magic does not make an anthropopathic appeal it may, and frequently does, bring to

<sup>1</sup> Dr. R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesians* (Clarendon Press, 1891), p. 191.

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bear its peculiar coercitive virtue upon anthropopathic beings. It aims then at compelling souls, spirits or gods, into doing the operator's will, or in preventing them from doing their own. In necromancy, spirits are summoned by means of spells and incantations. In old Egypt the art of dealing coercitively with spirits and gods reached a high development. Maspero, speaking of a strange belief regarding names, says, 'when the god in a moment of forgetfulness or of kindness had taught them what they wanted [the sacred names], there was nothing left for him but to obey them.'<sup>1</sup> At Eleusis, it was not the name but the intonation of the voice of the magician which produced the mysterious results.<sup>2</sup> But whether Magic acts upon personal or impersonal objects, its effective power is ever impersonal.

I would not give the impression in this attempt at classification, that the conceptions of the savage are clear and definite. I hold them to be, on the contrary, hazy and fluid. What appears to him impersonal one moment may

<sup>1</sup> 'Études de mythologie et d'archéologie égyptiennes' (Paris, 1903), *Bibliothèque Égyptologique*, ii. p. 298.

<sup>2</sup> Foucart, 'Recherches sur la Nature des Mystères d'Eleusis,' *Mémoires de l'Institut*, xxxv. 2nd part, pp. 31-32. Comp. Maspero, *ibid.*, p. 303.

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suddenly assume the characteristics of a spirit. *Mana*, for instance, although usually an impersonal force stored into plants, stones, animals or men, assumes at times truly personal traits; it becomes the god himself. One should not be surprised to meet with cases that fall between rather than in the classes, for the sharp lines of demarcation it suits us to draw are not often found in nature.

And now we return to our two theses.

**1. The Probable Priority of Magic.**—Certain historical facts might be held to support the pre-religious origin of Magic. As one descends from the higher to the lower social levels, Religion dwindles and Magic grows. In the lowest societies of which we have extensive and accurate knowledge, the Central Australian tribes, Religion is represented by mere rudiments, whereas Magic is everywhere and always in evidence. I have had occasion in a preceding section to quote Howitt with regard to the slight rôle played by Religion among the South-East Australians. The presence of Religion in the lives of the tribes inhabiting the central portions of Australia is still less obvious. Frazer reflects the views of Spencer and Gillen, of Howitt, and probably of every recent first-hand



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student of that country, when he writes: 'Among the aborigines of Australia, the rudest savages as to whom we possess accurate information, Magic is universally practised, whereas Religion, in the sense of a propitiation or conciliation of the higher powers, seems to be nearly unknown. Roughly speaking, all men in Australia are magicians, but not one is a priest; everybody fancies he can influence his fellows or the course of nature by sympathetic magic, but nobody dreams of propitiating gods by prayer and sacrifice.'<sup>1</sup> If we may trust our knowledge of other savages, the general fact thus affirmed of the native Australians holds good with regard to every other uncivilised tribe.

But as the least civilised of existing tribes are far from being 'primitive' in the true sense of the word, it could be argued that Magic is, after all, the outcome of the corruption of a primitive Religion, of which almost nothing remains in the savage tribes of the present day. And so we shall have to rest our case not upon historical evidences, but upon considerations regarding the psychological nature of Magic and Religion, and upon analogies we may discover between them

<sup>1</sup> 'The Beginnings of Religion,' *Fortn. Rev.*, lxxxiv. (1905), p. 162. Comp. *The Golden Bough*, 2nd ed., i. pp. 71-73.

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and certain facts observed in children and in adults of uncivilised races.

In his attempt to support the belief in the priority of Magic, Frazer, who has put every student of Religion in his debt by his monumental work, affirms its greater simplicity when compared with Religion. The opinion itself is tenable, but the defence of it, made as it is from the standpoint of the old English associationism, is unfortunately worthless. 'Magic,' he tells us, 'is nothing but a mistaken application of the very simplest and most elementary process of the mind, namely, the association of ideas by virtue of resemblance or contiguity,' while 'Religion assumes the operation of conscious or personal agents, superior to man, behind the visible screen of nature. Obviously the concept of personal agent is more complex than a simple recognition of the similarity or contiguity of ideas. . . . The very beasts associate the ideas of things that are like each other or that have been found together in their experience. . . . But who attributes to the animals a belief that the phenomena are worked by a multitude of invisible animals or by one enormous and prodigiously strong animal behind the scenes?'<sup>1</sup> It is undoubtedly true

<sup>1</sup> *The Golden Bough*, 2nd ed., i. p. 70. Oldenburg (*Die*

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that the mind of man tends to pass from an object to others like it, or experienced at the same time, but this psychological fact does not in itself account for Magic. The mind of animals is regulated in a similar manner. In spring-time the sight of a feather makes the bird think of nest-building, and the smell and sight of his master's coat brings the master to the dog's mind. Yet animals do not practise the magical art. This fact should be sufficient to make one realise the insufficiency of 'a simple [mistaken] recognition of the similarity and contiguity of ideas' as an explanation of the origin of Magic. An animal might observe the colour-likeness between carrots and jaundice (not, however, unless practical dealings with them had attracted his attention to the colour), and 'coat' and 'master' might follow each other in a dog's mind. But in order to treat the coat as he would the master, and in order to eat carrots or give them to be eaten for the cure of jaundice, there is required, in addition to the association, the belief that whatever is done to the coat will be suffered by the master, and that the eating of carrots will cure the

*Religion des Veda*, Berlin, 1894) was first, I believe, in holding to a pre-religious magical stage of culture. But it is Frazer who first made a clear separation, not only between Magic and Religion, but also between Magic and belief in spirit-agents.

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disease. It is the existence of these ideas with their motor and affective values and of their dynamic connection which makes Magic possible in beings subject to the laws of association. This fundamental difference between mere association of ideas and the essential mental processes involved in Magic, Frazer has completely overlooked. The difference may be further illustrated by the instance of a dog biting in a rage the stick with which he is being beaten. He is indeed doing to the stick what he would like to do to the man. But in attacking the stick he does not conceive that, although the stick is not the man, the injury done to it will hurt the man. His action is blindly impulsive, while the form of Magic in question involves generalisations and other mental processes not expressed by the laws of association.<sup>1</sup>

If magical actions cannot be deduced from the principle of association, they can at least be classified according to the kind of association they illustrate. For, although the various ideas brought together in Magic, in a relation of cause and effect, are frequently said to have come together by 'chance,' some of the conditions

<sup>1</sup> Comp. R. R. Marett, 'From Spell to Prayer,' *Folk-Lore*, xv. (1904), pp. 136-141.

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under which they have in fact become connected are expressed in the universal laws of association, namely, association by similarity or contrast, by contiguity or spatial opposition, and by emotional congruity or disparity. Whenever magical acts have been classified, it has been according to the principle of association.<sup>1</sup> But every kind of activity involving mental operations falls in some of its relations under the laws of association, hence the relative unfruitfulness of these classifications, hence also our attempt at grouping magical practices according to a factor of greater significance, namely, the nature of the power they involve.

### 2. The Independence of Religion from Magic.

—The following psychological arguments appear to me to go a long way towards proving that *magical behaviour has had an origin independent of the animistic<sup>2</sup> belief*, and that some of its forms, at least, antedated it, and therefore also Religion :—

<sup>1</sup> The latest classification is probably that of Frazer in *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship* (Macmillan, 1905), p. 54. A. van Gennep, in a review of that book in the *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, liii. pp. 396-401, offers a somewhat different classification.

<sup>2</sup> I use 'animism' in the sense which Tylor gave it, i.e. a belief in the animation of all things by beings similar to the 'souls' or 'ghosts' revealed to the savage by dreams and other natural experiences.

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(a) The absorbing interest found by young children in the *use* of things, and their complete indifference at first to the *modus operandi*, point, it would seem, to a stage in human development at which the explanation of things is not yet desired. It is well known that long before a child asks 'how?' he wearies his guardians with the question, 'what for?'<sup>1</sup> He wants to know what things are good for, and, in particular, what *he* can do with them before he cares for an understanding of their origin, and of their mechanism. This keen interest in the production of results, this curiosity about the practical meaning of things, is apparently quite independent of any abstract idea of power. Since the child passes through a pre-interpretative stage, may we not admit a corresponding period in racial development during which no explanatory soul-theory, no animistic philosophy, is entertained? A mental attitude such as this would make Religion impossible, while it would provide the essential condition for a Magic of our first class.

(b) Children—and adult savages resemble children in many respects—like to amuse them-

<sup>1</sup> The interested reader will find a summary of observations on this topic in Alex. F. Chamberlain's *The Child* (The Contemporary Science Series, 1900), pp. 147-148. See also Sully, *Studies of Childhood*, p. 82.



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selves by setting up prohibitions and backing them up with threats of punishment. 'If you do this,' they will say, 'that will happen to you.' The 'this' and the 'that' have usually no logical connection with each other, neither is there in the mind of the child any thought of a particular kind of power, or agent, meting out the punishment. This kind of play is strikingly similar to a large number of magical practices. Can it not be regarded as the prototype of most taboo customs? In taboo there is usually no logical and no qualitative relation between the prohibition and the punishment. Neither is there, ordinarily, any notion of a particular agent carrying out the threat. It involves, it seems, nothing more than the assumption of a causal connection between two facts brought together by 'chance' association under the pressure of a desire for food or success at war, or for the enforcement of a rule of conduct.<sup>1</sup> The punishment announced is anything on the efficacy of which one may choose to rely. In Madagascar conjugal fidelity is enforced by the threat that the betrayed husband will be killed or wounded in the war;

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, many of the prohibitions included in the initiation ceremonies of the Australians in Spencer and Gillen, *loc. cit.*, chapters vii-ix.

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among the indigenous tribes of Sarawak, the belief is that the camphor obtained by the men in the jungle will evaporate if the women are unfaithful during the absence of their husbands, while in East Africa, the husband would, in the same eventuality, be killed or hurt by the elephant he is hunting.<sup>1</sup> The high sanction which the requirements of social life give to beliefs of this sort is readily understood.

(c) It is a fact of common observation that in passionate moments, men of every degree of culture act, in the absence of the object of their passion, more or less as if it was present. A man grinds his teeth, shakes his fist, growls at the absent enemy; a mother presses to her breast and talks fondly to the departed babe. The pent-up motor tendencies must find an outlet. To restrain every external sign of one's desires or intentions when under great emotional excitement is unendurable pain. By the sick-bed of one beloved, one must do something, however useless to him. Who shall say that we do not have in this natural tendency the origin of the large class of magical acts represented by sticking pins into, or burning, an effigy? The less a person is under the control of reason, the more likely is he, not

<sup>1</sup> Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 2nd ed., i. pp. 29-31.

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only to yield to promptings of this order, but also to be seduced by his wish into a belief in their efficacy.

If any one finds it difficult to admit that the savage can so easily be deceived, I would direct his attention to the well-known instances of children's self-deceptions. Most of them behave, at a certain age, as if their dolls were alive and, to all appearances, there are some moments when they think so. What they think at other moments is another matter. We need not suppose that the savage cannot take, at times, a critical attitude and perhaps undeceive himself. It is sufficient that at other moments, when under the pressure of needs or in the excitement accompanying ceremonies of considerable social significance or of much personal importance, he should be able to assume the attitude of the believer. The behaviour of certain mentally deranged persons throws some light on this point. Such a person may believe that his hands are always dirty and be constantly washing them. If reasoned with, he may perhaps be convinced that they cannot be dirty. Yet a few seconds later he will exclaim, 'But I feel they are dirty,' and return to the wash-basin. The savage is under the control of his impulses

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and feelings to a degree approaching that of the person instanced. In this connection, the effect of repetition, and of the tribal sanction obtained by magical customs, should not be overlooked. They tend to make doubt and criticism next to impossible.

What need is there in cases of this kind to introduce a middle term between the actions of the magician and their expected effect? None whatsoever. The thought of an efficient agent or power passing out of the magician or of his instrument to work upon the victim is no necessary part of this type of Magic.

(d) The belief at the root of a great variety of magical practices, that 'like' produces 'like,' may have arisen in still other ways than the one just indicated. Nothing is more common than the invisible passage of things, be they heat, cold, light, thunderbolt, odours, diseases, etc., from one person or object to another, either by contact or through space. The frequent instances of diseases spreading by infection among men, animals, and vegetables, seem in themselves sufficient to suggest the belief that 'like' produces 'like.' The idea of contagion must have appeared very early indeed. Now, as the savage is quite unable to distinguish between the different agencies

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involved in the variety of experiences of this sort, he cannot draw the line between the 'likes' that really produce 'likes' and those that do not; hence his very strange expectations. This class of Magic also is independent of the conception of an agent effecting the connection between the objects related as cause and effect.

Since Tylor wrote his memorable work, the doctrine of animism has become classical. This passage from *Primitive Culture*,<sup>1</sup> 'What men's eyes behold is but the instrument to be used, or the material to be shaped, while behind it there stands some prodigious but half-human creature, who grasps it with his hands or blows it with his breath,' expresses, no doubt, fairly correctly, a very early philosophy of life. I would not object even to its being termed the earliest philosophy, provided it be granted that the progress of the human race was already well under way when it appeared. But when it is assumed, as it is by many, that the animistic conception of nature is necessary to, and antedates, the establishment of Magic, I must dissent and affirm that a very large number of magical practices neither presuppose, nor in any way involve, a belief in animism, and that there are good reasons for

<sup>1</sup> Fourth ed. (1903), i. p. 285.

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considering them original, *i.e.* not corruptions of practices primitively implying that belief. So much I trust to have shown in the preceding pages.<sup>1</sup>

I do not in the least deny that some of the magical practices in existence are derived from actions of a different character. Many of the 'superstitions' of civilised countries have had a long history. Several of the marriage customs; for instance, the cutting of the cake by the bride, and the lifting of the bride over the threshold, are vestiges of actions once necessary or useful.<sup>2</sup> But it would be absurd to conclude from the existence of derived magical practices that Magic, as a whole, is to be accounted for on a theory of 'lapsed intelligence.'

**Magic and Religion combine but never fuse.**—When ghosts and nature-beings have become mental possessions of the savage, one may expect the sphere of Magic to extend so as to include these unseen, mysterious beings. Why should not

<sup>1</sup> The word *naturism* should be adopted as a name for the pre-animistic and pre-religious stage of culture, a stage corresponding to the one through which a child passes before he inquires into hidden causes and mechanisms. See on this an excellent little book published in this series, *Animism*, by Edward Clodd, pp. 22-25.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Avebury, *On the Origin of Civilisation* (3rd ed., 1875), pp. 113-114.



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the magical power take effect upon ghosts and gods as well as upon men? The savage, like everybody else, is anxious to use every available means to secure his preservation and his advancement. Why then should he not use both Magic and the offering of food? From the moment Religion appears, until the efficiency of Magic is totally discredited, we may expect to find these two modes of behaviour associated in men's dealings with gods, except, however, where the god is clearly thought of as a world-creator. For the savage could hardly have the presumption of attempting to control a power he recognises as the maker of the human race and of the world. Here are two instances of the combination of Magic with Religion. 'In the Babar Archipelago, when a woman desires to have a child, she invites a man, who is himself the father of a large family, to pray on her behalf to Upulero, the spirit of the sun. A doll is made of red cotton, which the woman clasps in her arms, as if she would suckle it. Then the father of many children takes a fowl and holds it by the legs to the woman's head, saying, "O Upulero, make use of the fowl; let fall, let descend a child, I beseech you, I entreat you, let a child fall into my hands and on my lap." Then he asks the woman, "Has the

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child come?" and she answers, "Yes, it is sucking already." . . . Lastly, the bird is killed, and laid, together with some betel, on the domestic plate of sacrifice. . . .'<sup>1</sup> In this ceremony prayer and sacrifice to a god are associated with magical practices of a mimetic and sympathetic character. In a large number of ceremonies, the god is dealt with religiously in order to secure from him 'power,' and then Magic is added to make the power effective. In old Egypt one of the formulas according to which the help of gods was secured began with an appeal to them under their popular names. It was a prayer which they were free to heed or to neglect. Then followed, in order to compel them to act, an adjuration introducing the mystical names, 'those written at birth in their heart by their father and mother.'<sup>2</sup> The magician not only claimed the power to force the gods to do his bidding, but also, in case of disobedience, to punish them, even by destruction. Remnants of magical dealings with gods are found even in the Christian Religion, if we are to believe the authors quoted by Frazer.<sup>3</sup> Magic

<sup>1</sup> *The Golden Bough*, i. p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Maspero, *loc. cit.*, pp. 298-299.

<sup>3</sup> Amélie Bosquet, *La Normandie romanesque et merveilleuse* (Paris et Rouen, 1845), p. 308.

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and Religion are so closely interwoven in the life of peoples of low culture that some authors have affirmed the impossibility of separating them. Their affirmation need not be contradicted unless it be intended to mean that originally they were one and the same thing. However closely interwoven they may be, Magic and Religion remain distinct, as in the above instances. One might say, borrowing the language of the chemist, that they do not form compounds, but only mixtures.

**What did Magic contribute to the making of Religion? Frazer's Theory.**—Our conclusions are, so far, that Magic has had an independent origin, that it very probably antedated Religion, and that they associate for common purposes without ever fusing, for they are referable to different principles. Are we, then, driven to the opinion that even though Magic should have antedated Religion and been often combined with it in common undertakings, it has, nevertheless, contributed in no way to the establishment of Religion? That conclusion is not unavoidable. Frazer's conception presents an alternative which, however, we cannot accept. As he recognises not only a fundamental distinction, but even an

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opposition of principle between Magic and Religion, he cannot think of allowing the former a positive influence in the establishment of Religion. Yet he admits a genetic relation between them: it is, according to him, the recognition of the failure of Magic that is the cause of the worship of gods. 'I would suggest,' writes Frazer, 'that a tardy recognition of the inherent falsehood and barrenness of Magic set the more thoughtful part of mankind to cast about for a truer theory of nature and a more fruitful method of turning her resources to account.' When man saw that his magical actions were not the real cause of the activity of nature, it occurred to him that, 'if the great world went on its way without the help of him or his fellows, it must surely be because there were other beings, like himself, but far stronger, who, unseen themselves, directed its course and brought about all the various series of events which he had hitherto believed to be dependent on his own Magic. . . . To these mighty beings, whose handiwork he traced in all the gorgeous and varied pageantry of nature, man now addressed himself, humbly confessing his dependence on their invisible power, and beseeching them of their mercy to furnish him with all good things. . . . In this, or some such way as this,

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the deeper minds may be conceived to have made the transition from Magic to Religion.’<sup>1</sup> Several obvious objections may be raised against this view. I would remark first of all that Frazer does not discredit the sources of the belief in ghosts and in nature-beings mentioned in the preceding section: sleep and trances; apparitions; the impulse to personify great and startling natural phenomena; the idea of creation. His hypothesis of the origin of Religion is, therefore, superfluous, unless he could show that the transition from Magic to Religion took place in the manner he suggests before the experiences and reflections we have named had given rise to the idea of god.

The assumption on which Frazer’s hypothesis rests, namely, that sagacious men of wild races persuaded themselves and their fellows of the inefficiency of Magic, seems clearly contradicted by the history of the relation of Magic to Religion, and also by the psychology of belief. On the latter ground, he may justly be accused of attributing neither enough influence to the will to believe nor to the support it receives from the many apparent or real successes of Magic. These successes, with the help of the several ways of

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.* i., pp. 75-78.

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accounting for failures without giving up the belief,<sup>1</sup> were in my opinion sufficient to support a belief in the efficiency of Magic until long after the birth of Religion. Is not that the conclusion we must draw from the recent spread of the spiritualistic movement, not only among the untutored, but even among representatives of our higher culture? The late gains of spiritism have been made despite numberless failures, the repeated discovery of deception, and the satisfactory scientific explanation of a large proportion of the alleged spiritistic facts, and thanks merely to a desire to believe, and to a few questionable facts not readily explained by accepted hypotheses. To suppose that before ghosts and nature-beings had been thought of and made great enough to exercise a practical influence upon men's conduct, there had existed, in the barbarous circumstances implied in the supposition, persons so keenly observant, so capable of scientific generalisation, and so free from the obscuring influences of passion as to be able to reject the many instances of

<sup>1</sup> A widespread opinion ascribes the failures of the magician to a rival or to the counter-influence of some evil spirit.

'If a man died in spite of the medicine-man, they [the Chepara of South-East Africa] said it was Wulle, an evil being, that killed him.'—Howitt, *loc. cit.*, p. 385.



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apparent success of Magic, is to posit a miracle where a satisfactory natural explanation already exists.

In *Magic and Religion*, Andrew Lang directs a vigorous and successful attack upon Frazer's hypothesis.<sup>1</sup> A part of his argument, based on generally accepted historical data, is summarised in this passage: 'If we find that the most backward race known to us believes in a power, yet propitiates him neither by prayer nor sacrifice, and if we find, as we do, that in many more advanced races in Africa and America, it is precisely the highest power which is left unpropitiated, then we really cannot argue that gods were first invented as power who could give good things, on receipt of other good things, sacrifice and prayer.'<sup>2</sup> He remarks, in addition, that although one would not expect people who had recognised the uselessness of Magic and turned to gods, to continue the development of the magical art, yet, in order to find the highest Magic one has to go to no less a civilisation than that of Japan, where gods are plentiful.

Although the hypothesis that gods and Religion are the consequence of the recognition of the

<sup>1</sup> Chap. iii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

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failure of Magic, must be rejected, it does not follow that two modes of activity in the service of common purposes, as are Magic and early Religion, do not act upon each other in many ways. If Magic was first in the field, we may believe that the satisfaction it gave to man by its results, apparent and real, and in providing him with a means of expressing his desires, tended to retard the establishment of any other method of securing the same ends. The habit of doing a thing in a particular manner always stands more or less in the way of the discovery of other ways of doing the same thing. So that Magic was, in these respects, a hindrance to the making of Religion. There is, however, a grain of truth in Frazer's hypothesis. Had Magic completely satisfied man's multifarious desires, he would, in all probability, have paid but scant attention to the gods, for it is in times of trial that man turns to them. It was thus greatly advantageous to the making of Religion that the inadequacy of Magic should have been felt. Moreover, Magic exercised, in ways mentioned before, a very considerable influence on the general mental growth of savage populations; in this sense also it may be said to have helped Religion.

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In a penetrating comparison of Magic with Religion, Marett<sup>1</sup> points out how easily our third class of Magic—Spell-Magic—assumes ‘the garb of an affair between persons,’ and thus approaches very close to Religion. But even when Magic involves the ‘projection of an imperative will,’ the fundamental difference between the two modes of behaviour remains quite distinct. In ancient Peru, when a war expedition was contemplated, they were wont to starve certain black sheep for some days and then slay them, uttering the incantation, ‘As the hearts of these beasts are weakened, so let our enemies be weakened.’ If this utterance is to be regarded as expressing an attempt to project the operator’s ‘will’ upon the enemies, we are clearly in the realm of pure Magic. But if it is to be understood as addressed to a personal being, it is a prayer, and then we deal with an instance of the combination of Magic with Religion.

**Magic and the Origin of Science.**—A common opinion has it that Magic and not the mechanical type of behaviour is the precursor of science. Before bringing this chapter to a close, we shall

<sup>1</sup> R. R. Marett, ‘From Spell to Prayer,’ *Folk-Lore*, xv. (1904), pp. 132-165.

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try and determine in what sense this statement is to be understood.

The reader will remember that after discriminating roughly, in the introduction, the three modes of behaviour observable in man, I added that the anthropopathic behaviour becomes Religion when it is directed to gods, and the mechanical becomes science when the principle of quantitative proportion it implies is definitively recognised. Frazer, who sets forth in his great book the magical origin of science, may stand as the representative of that theory. 'Magic,' he tells us, 'is next of kin to science,' for science 'assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any special spiritual or personal agency. Thus its fundamental conception is identical with that of modern science; underlying the whole system is a faith, implicit, but real and firm, in the order and uniformity of nature . . . his power [the magician's], great as he believes it to be, is by no means arbitrary and unlimited. He can wield it only so long as he strictly conforms to the rules of his art, or to what may be called the laws of nature as conceived by him. . . . Thus the analogy between the magical and the scientific conception of the

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world is close. In both of them the succession of events is perfectly regular and certain, being determined by immutable laws, the operation of which can be foreseen and calculated precisely.<sup>1</sup> Upon this I observe, first, that the acknowledgment of a fixed relation between actions or beliefs and their results is not peculiar to Magic; it is implied also in Religion and, more perfectly, in mechanical behaviour. Salvation is by the right practice, or by the right faith, or both. The gods cannot be approached and conciliated in *any* way; worshipper, no less than magician, has to conform to a definite ritual. In certain not entirely barbarous communities salvation or damnation is held to follow, respectively, belief or disbelief in no less than thirty-nine articles! So that 'definite and certain succession of events,' their determination 'by immutable laws' to the elimination of caprice, chance, or accident, are expressions which apply, on the whole, as well to Religion as to Magic. These phrases do not denote a kinship of Magic to Science, which could not be claimed also by Religion.

Turning to another side of the matter, we

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*, pp. 61-62. In the third volume (pp. 458-461), a change seems to have taken place in the author's opinion. What it amounts to, I cannot exactly make out.

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observe that Frazer finds it convenient to minimise, in this connection, the considerable share of the personal, *i.e.* of the capricious, the incalculable, in Magic. The personality of the magician introduces an indeterminate and undeterminable factor about which enough has been said in preceding sections. Nothing could be in more direct antagonism to the scientific attitude than these two factors: the influence accorded to the personality of the magician and the belief in occult powers belonging to particular objects and events. So that it is truer to the facts to say that the fundamental conception of science, so far from being identical with that of Magic, is absent from it. For the essential presupposition of science—the one that differentiates it alike from Magic and from Religion—is the acknowledgment of definite and constant *quantitative* relations between causes and effects, relations which completely exclude the personal element and the occult. If that scientific presupposition is absent from Magic and from Religion, it is implicitly present in mechanical behaviour. The savage is nearer the scientific spirit and its method when he constructs a weapon to fit a particular purpose, or when he adjusts his bow and his arrow to the direction and the strength of the wind,



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than when he burns an enemy in effigy, abstains from sexual intercourse to promote success in the hunt, or exorcises diseases.

What magic shares with science is not the belief in the fundamental principle we have named, but the desire to gain the mastery over the powers of nature and the practice of the experimental method. The experimentation of Magic is, however, so limited and so unconscious that it can hardly be assimilated to the modern scientific method. If any one were to turn to history for an argument in support of the thesis defended by Frazer, and point out that the alchemist is the lineal ancestor of the scientist, the sufficient answer would be—(1) Historical succession does not imply continuity of principle. Although Magic, Alchemy, and Science form an historical sequence, the fundamental principle of the last is not to be found in the others. (2) The clear recognition of the principle of fixed quantitative relations is, whenever and wherever it appears, the birth of Science and the death of both Magic and Alchemy. This last fact demonstrates clearly the fundamental enmity of these arts to the scientific principle.

The discovery of the scientific principle was probably almost as much hindered by the false notions

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and the pernicious habits of mind encouraged by Magic, as furthered by the gain in general mental activity and knowledge which it brought about. Magic, no more than Religion, encourages the exact observation of external facts, but rather self-deception with regard to them.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ORIGINAL EMOTION OF PRIMITIVE RELIGIOUS LIFE

THE failure to recognise in Religion three functionally related constituents—conation, feeling, and thought—is responsible for a confusing use of the term ‘origin.’ Some have said that Religion began with the belief in superhuman, mysterious beings; others that it had its origin in the emotional life, and these usually specify fear; while a third group have declared that its genesis is to be found in the will-to-live. At this stage of our inquiry the reader realises no doubt that these three utterances are incomplete, inasmuch as each one of them expresses either the origin, or the original form, of only one of the constituents of Religion.

I have in the preceding sections dealt with the establishment of the religious attitude or behaviour and, afterwards, more specifically, with the origin of the god-idea. The space at my disposal does not allow me to say anything regarding the rise of the methods by which man entered in relation

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with the divine beings in whom he believes. For the same reason, I shall have to be very brief in dealing with the original emotional form of Religion.

Two opposed opinions divide the field. The more widely held is that fear is the beginning of Religion; the other, accepted by a small but weighty minority, that it has its origin in a 'loving reverence for known gods.' We shall have little difficulty in arriving at an understanding of the matter in which these two views, instead of opposing, supplement each other. The origin of the two emotions mentioned, fear and love, fall, of course, outside the limits of this essay, since they both existed before Religion.

'Fear begets gods,' said Lucretius. Hume concluded that 'the first ideas of religion arose . . . from a concern with regard to the events of life and fears which actuate the human mind' A similar opinion is maintained by most of our contemporaries. Among psychologists, Ribot, for instance, affirms that 'the religious sentiment is composed first of all of the emotion of fear in its different degrees, from profound terror to vague uneasiness, due to faith in an unknown, mysterious, impalpable Power.'<sup>1</sup> The fear-theory is well

<sup>1</sup> *The Psychology of the Emotions*, p. 309.

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supported by two classes of interdependent facts observed, we are told, in every uncivilised people: (1) Evil spirits are the first to attain a certain degree of definiteness; (2) man enters into definite relations first with these evil spirits. If the reader will refer to *The Origin of Civilisation* by Lord Avebury (Sir John Lubbock), 3rd ed., pp. 212-215, he will see there how widely true is the opinion expressed by Scheinfurth:—‘Among the Bongos of central Africa good spirits are quite unrecognised, and, according to the general negro idea, no benefit can ever come from a spirit.’ In many other tribes the good spirits are known, but the savage always ‘pays more attention to deprecating the wrath of the evil than securing the favour of the good beings.’ The tendency is to let alone the good spirits, because, being good, they will do us good of themselves, just as evil spirits do us harm unsolicited.

Shall we, then, admit the fear-origin of Religion? Yes, provided it be understood that fear represents only one of the three constituents of Religion, that it is not in virtue of a particular quality or property that fear is the primitive emotional form of Religion, and that this admission is not intended to imply the impossibility of Religion

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having ever anywhere begun with aggressive or tender emotions. Regarding the second reservation, it should be understood that the making of Religion requires nothing found in fear that is not also present in other emotions. If aggressive emotions are not conspicuous at the dawn of Religion, it is only because it so happens that the circumstances in which the least cultured peoples known to us live are such as to keep fear in the foreground of consciousness. Fear was the first of the well-organised emotional reactions. It antedated the human species, and appears to this day first in the young animal, as well as in the infant. No doubt, before the protective fear-reaction could have been established, the lust of life had worked itself out into aggressive habits, those for the securing of food, for instance. But these desires did not, as early as in the case of fear, give rise to any emotional reaction possessing the constancy, definiteness, and poignancy of fear. The place of fear in primitive Religion is, then, due not to its intrinsic qualities, but simply to circumstances which made it appear first as a well-organised emotion vitally connected with the maintenance of life. It is for exactly the same reason that the dominant emotion in the relations of uncivilised men with each other, and



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still more evidently so, of wild animals with each other, is usually that of fear.

When I said that fear need not have been the original religious emotion, I had in mind the possibility of groups of primitive men having lived in circumstances so favourable to peace and safety that fear was not very often present with them. This is not a preposterous supposition. Wild men need not, any more than wild animals, have found themselves so situated as to be kept in a constant state of fright. If the African antelope runs for its life on an average twice a day, as Francis Galton supposes, the wild horse on the South American plains, before the hunter appeared on his pastures, ran chiefly for his pleasure. Travellers have borne testimony to the absence of fear in birds inhabiting certain regions. But, it may be asked, would Religion have come into existence under these peaceful circumstances? A life of relative ease, comfort, and security is not precisely conducive to the establishment of practical relations with gods. Why should happy and self-sufficient men look to unseen, mysterious beings for an assistance not really required? Under these circumstances the unmixed type of fear-Religion would never have come into existence. Religion would have appeared later, and from the first in a nobler form.

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In such peoples a feeling of dependence upon benevolent gods, regarded probably as Creators and All-Fathers, eliciting admiration rather than fear or selfish desire, would have characterised its beginnings. This possibility should not be rejected *a priori*.

The other theory is well represented by W. Robertson Smith. He denies that the attempt to appease evil beings is the foundation of Religion. I quote: 'From the earliest times religion, as distinct from magic or sorcery, addresses itself to kindred and friendly beings, who may indeed be angry with their people for a time, but are always placable except to the enemies of their worshippers or to renegade members of the community. It is not with a vague fear of unknown powers but with a loving reverence for known gods who are knit to their worshippers by strong bonds of kinship, that religion, in the only sense of the word, begins.'<sup>1</sup> One may agree with Robertson Smith without denying that certain practices intended to avert impending evils preceded the establishment of affectionate relations with benevolent powers. As a matter of fact, our author admits this fully. What he denies is that the attempt to propitiate, in dread, evil spirits, is

<sup>1</sup> *The Religion of the Semites*, p. 55.

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Religion. It cannot be doubted that the inner experience as well as the outer attitude and behaviour of a person are substantially different when he seeks to conciliate a radically evil being and when he communes with a fundamentally benevolent one. Yet in both cases an anthropopathic relation with a personal being is established. In this respect, both stand opposed to magical behaviour. This common element is so fundamental that it seems to us advisable to make the name Religion include both types of relation. And since they differ, nevertheless, in important respects, the phrases *Negative Religion* may be used to designate man's dealings with radically bad spirits, and *Positive Religion* his relations with fundamentally benevolent ones.

Positive Religion is at first not at all free from fear. The benevolent gods are prompt to wrath, and cruelly avenge their broken laws. The more striking development of religious life is the gradual substitution of love for fear in worship.<sup>1</sup> This is one more reason for not completely dissociating the propitiation of evil spirits from the worship of kindly gods.

<sup>1</sup> See, on this development, my article, 'Fear, Awe, and the Sublime in Religion,' *American Jr. of Religious Psy. and Educ.*, ii. p. 1.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE NATURE AND THE FUNCTION OF RELIGION

THE organised, historical Religions are sufficiently described, in their objective aspect, as systems of practical relations with unseen, hyperhuman, and personal Beings. The experiences in which this type of Religion consists, when subjectively considered, are the states of consciousness correlated with the aforesaid relations. Judged according to this definition, several savage tribes and a very large number of persons among civilised peoples would have to be accounted non-religious. Most of them may, however, lay claim to what we have called Passive Religiosity. In these concluding pages we propose to give increased precision and coherence to the conception of Religion presented in this essay. We shall do so under two heads, (1) Passive and (2) Godless Religions.

1. Andrew Lang's polemic against Frazer's definition of Religion will serve as a convenient

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text for the introduction of what we wish to say under the first head. According to the habit of anthropologists, Frazer has put forward as the mark of Religion the *propitiation or the conciliation* of personal beings superior to man and believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life. Lang objects, and very properly, that this definition is too narrow. 'I mean by Religion,' says he, 'what Mr. Frazer means and more. The conciliation of higher powers by prayer and sacrifice is Religion, but it need not be the whole of Religion. The belief in a higher power who sanctions conduct and is a father and a loving one to mankind is also Religion,'<sup>1</sup> although it should not be accompanied by request for benefits. The presence in the higher societies and even at the dawn of civilisation of persons strangers to any religious rite, yet influenced by a belief in divine beings cannot be denied. With regard to the most barbarous of the Australian savages Howitt writes: 'If Religion is defined as being the formulated worship of a divinity, then these savages have no Religion; but I venture to assert that it can be no longer maintained that they have no belief which can be called Religion, that

<sup>1</sup> *Magic and Religion*, pp. 48-49, 69.

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is, in the sense of beliefs which govern tribal and individual morality under a supernatural sanction.'<sup>1</sup> The reader will remember that we included under the term Religion the amorphous relations to which Howitt alludes. But the difference, objective and subjective, between the organised Religions, let us say that of Saint Ignatius, and the guiding and restraining influence exercised upon an African savage or a Parisian deist by the apprehension of a Great Ruler, justifies the use of the differentiating appellations, Passive and Active Religion.

We take this opportunity of remarking how difficult it is even for particularly clear-headed persons to keep Religion distinct from philosophy. Lang was ill-advised enough to write in the same place, 'If men believe in a potent being who originally made or manufactured . . . things, that is an idea so far religious that it satisfies, by the figment of a supernatural agent, the speculative faculty.' What has 'the speculative faculty' to do with Religion? As little as the gratification of the æsthetic or of any other 'faculty,' *i.e.* nothing at all. The outcome of speculative thinking is *philosophy*, of which

<sup>1</sup> 'On some Australian Customs of Initiation,' *Jr. of the Anthropol. Inst.*, xiii. (1883-1884), p. 459.



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Religion may make use, but that is not a reason for confusing it with philosophy. The religious experience consists not in seeking to understand God, but in fearing Him, in feeding upon Him, in finding strength and joy in Him. If believers in Ruling Powers may be called religious, it is not because they possess *an idea* of these powers, but in virtue of the guiding and inspiring influence these powers exert upon them.

2. *The Godless Religions.*—We have found it convenient up to this point to speak as if Power had to be personal in order to become the centre of a Religion. That view would exclude original Buddhism, the Religion of Humanity, and several other varieties of mental attitudes generally regarded as religious. The significant fact that until recently every existing historical Religion was a worship of a personal Divinity, is not a sufficient reason for refusing to recognise other types. The affinity between the worship of a God and certain relations maintained with non-personal sources of power is substantial enough to be recognised by the use of a name common to both.

What are the Religions that dispense with a God? Original Buddhism, and the Religion of Humanity formulated by A. Comte, are the only

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ones possessing a somewhat definite form and organisation. The Buddha Gautama discovered and offered to man a way of salvation in which the efficient power was not an external, personal power, but an indwelling, psychic principle. But the disciples speedily deified the Master who had enjoined them to adore no one, and substituted for his teaching the worship of the God Gautama. So that, almost as soon as born, Buddhism ceased to exist as a Godless Religion.

‘Humanity’ is qualified to become the centre of a Religion because its service accomplishes for man in essence and by similar methods precisely what the acknowledged Religions do for their disciples.<sup>1</sup> I quote from A. Comte: ‘Around this Real, Great Being, immediate instigator of each individual and collective existence, our feelings and desires centre as spontaneously as do our ideas and actions. . . . More readily accessible to our feelings as well as to our thinking [than the chimerical beings of the existing Religions], because of an identity of nature which does not preclude its superiority over all its servants, a Supreme Being such as this excites deeply an activity destined to preserve and to improve it

<sup>1</sup> F. Harrison, *Moral and Religious Socialism*, New Year's Address, 1891.

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[the Supreme Being].'<sup>1</sup> The claim of original Buddhism and of Comtism to be called Religions is, in our opinion, legitimate, because they each provide an inclusive, non-material source of power and a method of drawing upon it.

But the term Religion is used by some in a still wider sense. Professor J. R. Seeley, for instance, bestows that valued name upon 'any habitual and permanent admiration.'<sup>2</sup> Should we concur in this extension, it would be difficult to stop anywhere. We should have to admit almost anything which any one may have a fancy for designating by that much-abused word, even to 'the sense of eternity in connection with our higher experiences,' and 'the feeling of reality and permanence of all we most value.' But since the function of words is to delimitate, one defeats the purpose of language by stretching the meaning of a word until it has lost all precision and unity of meaning. We would therefore throw out of our definition anything which did not include:—  
(1) A belief in a great and superior psychic power—whether personal or not. (2) A dynamic relation—formal and organised or otherwise—between

<sup>1</sup> A. Comte, *Catéchisme Positiviste*, ed. Apostolique (1891), pp. 53, 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Natural Religion*, Macmillan (1882), p. 74.

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man and that Higher Power tending to the preservation, the increase, and the ennobling of life. This conception is broad enough to include even the uncrystallised form of Religion conditioned, in the words of Professor James, by 'an assurance that this natural order is not ultimate, but a mere sign or vision, the external staging of a many-storied universe, in which spiritual forces have the last word and are eternal.'

Active Religion may properly be looked upon as that portion of the struggle for life, in which use is made of the Power we have roughly characterised as psychic and superhuman, and for which other adjectives, 'spiritual,' 'divine,' for instance, are commonly used. In this biological view of Religion, its necessary and natural spring is the same as that of non-religious life, *i.e.* the 'will to live' in its multiform appearances, while the ground of differentiation between the religious and the secular is neither specific feelings nor emotions, nor yet distinctive impulses, desires, or purposes, but the nature of the force which it is attempted to press into service. The current terms, 'religious feeling,' 'religious desire,' 'religious purpose,' are deceptive if they are supposed to designate affective experiences,

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desires and purposes met with only in religious life.

The conception of the Source of Psychic Energy, without the belief in which no Religion can exist, has undergone very interesting transformations in the course of historical development. The human or animal form ascribed to the gods in the earlier Religions became less and less definite. At the same time the number of gods decreased. The culmination of this double process was Monotheism, in which the One, Eternal, Creator and Sustainer of life was no longer necessarily framed in the shape of man or beast: though still anthropathic, he might be formless. Sympathy, love, and justice were among his attributes. In a second phase, this formless, but personal, God was gradually shorn of all the qualities and defects which make individuality. He became the passionless Absolute in which all things move and have their being. Thus, the personifying work of centuries is undone, and humanity, after having, as it were, lived throughout its infancy and youth under the controlling eye and with the active assistance of personal divinities, on reaching maturity, finds itself bereft of these sources of life. The present religious crisis marks the difficulty in the way of an adaptation

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to the new situation. As belief in a God seems no longer possible, man seeks an impersonal, efficient substitute, belief in which will not mean disloyalty to science. For man will have life, and have it abundantly, and he knows from experience that its sources are not only in meat and drink, but also in 'spiritual faith.' It is this problem which the Comtists, the Immanentists, the Ethical Culturists, the Mental Scientists are all trying to solve. Any solution will have the right to the name Religion that provides for the preservation and the perfecting of life by means of faith in a superhuman psychic Power.

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