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The Genesis of Religion

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Thesis

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Genesis of religion.

THE GENESIS OF RELIGION.

We begin with a simple recognition of religion as a social fact. True, there is possibly room for contesting one implication of this premise -- the universality of religion as a social fact. Not much depends upon it, yet as the evidence is not all on one side fairness requires the recognition of it. Twenty-seven years ago Sir John Lubbock made a catalogue of unreligious tribes with his authorities for them. Later and more careful investigation has however shown many statements of fact upon which he relied to have been illfounded and his conclusions erroneous. Much depends upon the definition of religion. If it include only the higher forms of belief in spiritual beings and their relations to mankind then of course religion can be predicated only of people possessed of an advanced culture. If however the boundary lines between

[×]Prehistoric Times, p. 564.

[&]quot;Origin of Civilization, p. 122.

[⊗]Tyler: Primitive Culture, Vol. I, p. 418.

[&]quot;Spencer: Principles of Sociology, Vol. I, p. 280.

religion and superstition be too indefinite for indication, and the distinction between them one of degree and not of kind--- as it is the unquestionable tendency of present day scholars to believe ---- then Mr. Ward's statement seems beyond controversy. "The study of the ideas of primitive man is nearly the same as the study of the genesis and history of religion." "Nothing was earlier developed; nothing has manifest itself more universally", says Dr. Thomas K. Davis. The statement is pretty broad. The exact relation logically and chronologically, between religion and the family, for instance, is at least open to discussion. In the main however the statement is correct. Two things may be stated as facts. First, all peoples in all times and all places concerning whom we have reliable information are possessors

X Dynamic Sociology, Vol. I, p. 195.

X John Fiske: The Idea of God, p. 66.X

S Wooster Quarterly, October, 1896, p. 19.

of religion. Second, the same ideas, customs and institutions, perpetually recurring among primitive peoples, offer apparently solid ground for the conclusion, that if we could obtain reliable information as to all others, we should find them, too, religious.

So that while it is true that absolute certainty, as to each and every tribe that has ever existed, would require direct information concerning each--- information for the gaining of which the times are now tardy--- still, there is a fair degree of security in the assertion that "religion is practically coexrensive with man".

This religious fact we are to consider as a social fact; that is, we are to study it as manifest in the life of the race. The material for our investigation consists of the religious thoughts and feelings and deeds of mankind; and these are to be

x Fairbairn: Philosophy of Religion and History, p. 13.

considered as purely the products of human life. Doubtless there are abundant grounds both within, and without the sociological field, upon which to assert the truth, or the falsity of particular religious ideas, and the consequent propriety or impropriety of particular religious conduct. We are not concerned with this.

No opinion is advanced as to any of these matters. Our investigation is confined to one particular field and aims to be historical in method rather than philosophical.

This fact--- religion--- is obviously of the largest import.

That it has been so regarded by thinkers, from the beginning is proven by the place given it in all literature. In no department of literature does it hold a more prominent place, than in that which is devoted to the study of society. It is one of the prime forces which have shaped the social institutions of the world.

Next to those primary forces, the desire to preserve self and the desire to propagate kind, the religious impulses of men have been the most potent social force. Indeed, it has often been held to be the primary force; and it may fairly be questioned if the two former mentioned impulses are not so thoroughly fused and blended with the religious impulse, as to defy other than a theoretical separation.

This social prominence of religion has always thrust itself upon the student of society, demanding an explanation. And the demand has called forth a multitude of theories. "Natural Histories of Religion" did not begin with Mr. Hume; they are as old as thought. Whenever man has made an effort to understand himself as a social being he has made an effort to explain the nature and genesis of religion. True, no doubt, much of his work

X DeCoulanges: The Ancient City,

S Fairbairne: Philosophy of Religion and History, p. 17.

in this line has been crude. Oft-times he has done little else than repeat a traditional account. Sometimes he has reasoned, and less often, he has investigated, according to his light. the whole theories of the ethnic religions may be reduced to 1. They are the remains in varying states of disintethree. gration of an original supernatural all-sufficient revelation. They are the fruits of man's intuitive recognition of his 2. relation to spiritual and supernatural beings. 3. They are the natural and necessary outcome of the evolution of man. Born of human nature, their conception is due to the experiences of that human nature.

The first two of these views call for no discussion, now.

The practical demonstration that human history has always tended upward has absolutely discredited theory number one. The

psychology of the last half century has taken the foundation from theory number two. The same sciences, which have abolished the first two theories, have powerfully reinforced and explained the third.

This account of the nature and origin of religion is presented in various ways which shade into each other. It is a long distance from the Epicurean dictum "That fear has created the gods", to the elaborate and careful doctrines of Tyler and Spencer. In the main however they agree that primitive religions express the primitive man theory of things. That is to say, religious ideas, like other ideas, are the product of thought, and that thought is the child of experience. The primitive man is confronted by two problems, himself, and the universe; religion is Not that he recognizes these problems, and his answer.

KAnimism. OPeschel: Races of Man.

S Principles of Sociology. pp. 245, 261.

SHearne: The Aryan Household, Chap. I.

as their solution; but that his experience of himself, his fellows, and the world, presents to him phenomena and an explanation of them, sometimes in sequence, sometimes simultaneously, or even sometimes in a reverse order of sequence.

It must be confessed that the facts upon which to rest the theory are found in a land of shadows, where the lines which separate things waver, and vision may easily be deceived; yet on the whole, the evidence seems fairly clear, and to admit of but one interpretation. In the primitive man's experience, there are many events, peculiarly fitted to give rise to that which we call religion. As soon as he begins to think at all, the phenomenon of his own being asks an explanation--- one which is not readily

for the coming. Possibly, dreams first suggest the train of ideas which results in the religious explanation. The conditions and customs of primitive life make that life a series of alternative feasts and famines. Thus are produced the physical conditions from which come dreams of great vividness. The dreamer is not trained to nice discrimination of his mental states, and his dreams suggest actual experiences. They remain in his memory, after the sleep is passed, and the events, which have really taken place only in the irregular activity of his brain, are believed in as realities of experience. And here, two, separate, yet analogous, notions arise -- One as to the dreamer himself -- one as to other beings. The events of his dream have occurred at a distance from the place in which he lay down to sleep, and in which he finds himself when he awakes; his wife and others who have been

present while he slept, testify that his body has not moved from that position. He feels forced to conclude, that, while his physical man has remained in his hut, himself has been absent at a feast, or in a battle, or on the chase. With him, in his dream were friends, acquaintances, or enemies, whose bodies, he has reason to believe, were at the same time, far distant from the locality where he met them. And by the same train of reasoning, by which he has arrived at a conception of his own duality, he reaches one of theirs. Thus in the idea of his own absence from the body in dreams, and in that of the absence of others from their bodies, not alone when they dream, but when he dreams of them he has the ground work for a philosophy of spiritual things. To this view the phenomena of swoon, appoplexy, catalepsy, fainting from wounds or weakness, which he often observes in others, as well as experiences in himself seem perfectly to conform. In all

X Lubbock: Origin of Civilization, p. 126.

these cases the body is there, but the peculiar thing, by which he distinguishes man, is not there. The obvious explanation, and the one which he adopts, is that of a second self, who leaves the body, and again returns to it. The striking resemblance between some of these states and death, the impossibility, in many cases, of distinguishing them from death, and the facts, that some whom he regards as dead revive, while others whom he has before seen revive from a seemingly like state, finally do not revive, these and kindred facts easily lead him to conclude that death is but a longer absence from the body. Ere this the shadow has been observed, and byavery simple mental process, identified with this "alter ego". Now it is observed, that with death the breath ceases, and there is a further identification of this breath with the shadow self, who now receives a name -- the same in nearly all languages -- soul, spirit, ghost.

[×] Fiske: The Idea of God, pp. 67 and 68.

Having arrived at a satisfactory explanation of himself, it is easy for the embryo philosopher, as his expanding mind demands an explanation of the external universe, to carry over to it the same theory which has fitted his own case so well. Thus the various facts and forces of nature, from bird and beast to tree and grass, from gleaming star to clod, are endowed with a spiritual nature.

The separation of the soul from the body, which thus comes to be regarded as the essence of death, becomes the ground of a doctrine of immortality, and it only needs that primitive man should draw the obvious conclusion, that the future life is just like this, and indeed, keeps up a continual connection with this, to find reason for those offerings which speedily develop into sacrifice and libation: while the family tie, the recurring seasons, and the various aspects of the heavens give rise to deities with their cults.

All this seems very simple. The process however is lesssimple than a cursory description of it. Were our primitive man a mere thinking machine, extremely narrow and uncultivated in observation, but measurably logical in his reasoning, the story as thus told might fit his case fairly well. But he is not. Rude and uncultured as he is when religion is born in him, he was yet the most marvelous combination of doubts, fears, feelings, The path by which he reaches that definite dreams, and guesses. conception of spiritual beings, which we call religion, so far from being a straight and broad one, is most narrow, and tortuous, as well as being so long, that no man can measure it. The experiences and observations which make the raw material of his doctrine, are of myriad numbers, and almost countless types. While the psychological processes by which he works these materials

XPrimitive Culture, Vol. I, p. 428.

up into a religion, are almost past finding out. One proposition however, may be stated with a fair degree of certainty. Into his theories, as into all religious doctrines there goes a vast amount of feeling; vastly more than the writers upon the subject have admitted. For the thing which distinguishes religion from a mere explanation of phenomena is the presence of feeling, not simply as a sequence of the explanation, but as a part, and indeed, the essential part of both the phenomena and the explana-And while it is, no doubt, true, that "religion is the tion. primitive man's natural philosophy", it is vastly more than that. Natural philosophy does not so mix itself with all the most hidden and secret springs of human life as religion has done. And when we hear, so reliable, and so purely an intellectual authority, as Mr. George J. Romanes saying, "The sub-conscious

^{*}Hearne: The Aryan Household, p. 17.

(and therefore unahalyzable) influences, due to the experiences of life" are potent, both in his mental processes and in furnishing material for his views, we may well believe, that these "subconscious influences" -- the complex of a myriad experiences, aided and abetted by those multitudinous feelings, of which he is conscious, but whose meaning he does not understand, have wrought potently in producing the religious ideas of rudimentary man. That it has done so, I believe a careful scrutiny of the psychological processes, by which the primitive man arrives at his religion, will reveal.

These religious ideas originate in an attempt to explain phenomena. To understand the ideas aright then, we must scrutinize three things: first, the faculty by which the explanation is formulated. Second, the phenomena which are explained.

X Thoughts on Religion, p. 100.

Third, the operation of the faculty in reaching the explanation.

As to the first. At a glance, any special scrutiny seems Solutions of problems are performed by the reasoning superfluous. faculty, and it is one and the same faculty whether its possessor be a primitive, uncultured, or a developed, highly cultured The truth seems too clear for discussion. But is it being. so clear? If the theory of human evolution be true-- and if it be not true, this discussion is entirely superfluous -- mind is as much a product of evolution as is body. That of course means that mind, as we know it, is the result of infinitesimal modifications, through an indefinite period of time. It is absurd to say, that the primitive mind -- the mind in which consciousness is just born, is the counterpart of the developed mind of adult humanity. As a matter of fact, it is well understood that the two are vastly different, not only in degree but in kind. And

the steps by which mind comes into being are something like the following. (a) Irritability; (b) Sensation; (c) Perception; (d) Consciousness; (e) Memory; (f) Representation; (g) Understand-Of course all this must be taken "cum grano salis". That ing. sensation and perception in a way imply consciousness all recog-The truth, no doubt, is, that the three are builded nize. None the less true is it, that sensation is the together. original and primary, out of which all the other faculties are developed; and that intellectual development is a process of growing away from the primary into the later and higher faculties. This indicates the fact, that the primitive mind is dominated by feeling. In it a minimum of reason is buried in a maximum of feeling like "two grains of wheat in two bushels of chaff". All the rational processes are modified, and in a large measure

X Lefevre; Philosophy, p. 312.

[&]amp; Romanes; The Origin of Human Faculty.

SWard; The Psychic Factors of Civilization, pp. 93 and 94.

invalidated, by the intrusion into them of this element of feeling. Conclusions are as much, or more, the product of that instinctive feeling which we, inaccurately, call "intuition" as, of logical processes; And when those conclusions are drawn, the element of feeling remains in them.

earliest, and most primitive, product of the human mind. The conclusion seems inevitable, that into religious ideas, from the side of the agent in their formation, there has always mone a large element of feeling.

Second. -- When we turn to the material, of religious ideas, -the phenomena, in an attempt to understand which, these ideas have
arisen -- we find this element still more prominent. Beginning
with dreams, -- we are confronted by the fact that the chief
element in the dream is the feeling of the dreamer. "Its

intensity is as great as that of a sensation given in direct perception, and it is as such that it is regarded by the dreamer." Were it not for this fact, the dream would not be remembered. and we should never have a philosophy of dreams, under the name "The mind takes an interest only in that which of religion. Ordinarily "in dreams the force of arouses the feelings." attention is greatly diminished; " and this finds its explanation, in the fact that "dreams are dominated by ideas of sight and sound" in which, the feelings are seldom stimulated to any great It is only when some dream more vivid than usual, and which affects the feeling, as a blinding light, or a discharge of artillery affects the sense, that the dream is remembered. Then the impression made by the dream, is by the dreamer, referred simply,

Wundt; Human and Animal Psychology, p. 325.

S Ladd; Physiological Psychology, p. 79.

[/] Baldwin; Hand Book of Psychology, Vol. I, p. 185.

⁸ Mundt; Ibid, p. 325.

and solely, to the external object which he believes himself to have seen or heard in his dream. It is thus remembered and The element in the becomes the subject of subsequent thought. dream, which arrests his attention, and compels recollection, is the feeling, which he conceives to be due to an actual experience, utterly failing to discriminate between the imaginary, and the real. Thus that which is, indeed, wholly feeling subjectively induced, is interpreted, as being sensation due to an ex-The sensations of sight and feeling, which ternal relation. dominate dreams, are those which are most easily revivable, so that, when the representative faculty places before the mind the vision, or the sound, of the dream, the feelings of the dream

reappear with marked distinctness, to take their place in the

[×] Wundt; Human and Animal Psychology, p. 213;

[&]quot;Shoup; Mechanism and Personality, p. 205

[&]quot;Baldwin; Hand Book of Psychology, Vol. I, p. 84.

[&]quot;Sir William Hamilton; Metaphysics, Bowen's Ed. p. 320.

o Wundt; pp. 326 and 327.

Bain; The Emotions and the Will, p. 89.

conception which the dreamer forms.

So far then as dreams, the primary material of religious ideas, are concerned, they are wholly matters of feeling, only misinterpreted by the "hocus pocus" of a mind in which, reason is held in a solution of feeling.

Passing to the swoon, appoplexy, catalepsy, and kindred phenomena, which are amalgamated with dreams in primitive religious theories; it is to be observed, 1, that in so far as they are the experiences of the individual himself, they are substantially identical with the dream. Swoon from weakness, hunger, or loss of blood, is accompanied by sensations scarrely capable of discrimination from the feeling of dreams, even by the cultivated mind -- much less by the rudimentary one. As to the sensations accompanying appoplexy, etc., it is difficult to say. I find nothing of them in the books, and am unable to meet any one who has experienced them, and has a sufficiently vivid recollection, and enough discrimination, to throw satisfactory light on the subject. It would, hower, seem probable, that these sensations too, are readily assimilated to the feelings of a dream or a nightmare. So that these do not really furnish any additional data to the primitive philosopher. 2, When these are matters, not of his own experience, but seen in others, he interprets them in the light of his own experience, or of the theories which are held by himself and his neighbors in common.

When we turn to the other elements of primitive religious ideas— the shadow, the breath, etc.,—— we discover that they are later in taking their place in the theory, and are only interpreted in conformity with theories already formed, and formula no proper part of the subject matter of this thesis.

Third .-- At the opening of the discussion of the psychological processes, by which these sensations, feelings and perceptions, are wrought up into religious ideas, we are confronted by almost insuperable difficulties. If all primitive man had a certain fund of this material, and went quietly about his endeavor to gain an understanding of it, unvexed and uninterrupted by new dreams and new experiences, the task would be simpler. Were his reasoning faculty clear and undistorted, however weak his powers, But neither of these things is true. it would be still simpler. These ideas were not formed at a sitting. Who can give us the measure of the centuries which elapsed between the first impression which was subsequently interpreted into religious idea, and the first religious idea ? And during that period what multitudes, and what varieties of dreams, swoons, shadows, and feelings were In that rude, wild life, the days and the nights experienced !

were quick with myriads of phenomena, alike adding to the new material for his theorizing, modifying his faculties, and giving direction to his mental processes; so that, really the best we can do, in the way of understanding them is to give a shrewd guess.

ment in it which causes it to be remembered is that of feeling.

It has also been mentioned that with the recollection of the dream the feeling reappears with marked distinctness. There is indeed a resurrection, to all appearances, of certain sensation experienced in the dream. "Feelings produced by recollections nearly equal real sensation in intensity, and sometimes are localized." The feeling of the dream thus compels its recollection, and the recollection reproduces the feeling.

X Bain; The Emotions and the Will.

S Scripture; Thinking, Feeling and Doing, p. 223.

o Giddings: The Principles of Sociology, P.112

importance to dreams.

These dreams, varying in character, are yet by the dreamer, all assimilated to one fundamental notion, the primary element in Concurrently with his dreams he experiences which is feeling. waking emotions -- fear, anger, love, thrill him through and The nervous panic, into which these throw him, is to through. his undiscriminating mind of the same general order with the feeling of his dreams; and his contemplation of it leads him to the conclusion that it is like the other and proceeds from the Then comes hysteria or ecstacy-- produced at first same source. by some accident within or without, and a new feeling is assimilated to that which was already known, and the whole class becomes data for his theorizing.

Now this feeling, it is true, is not thought; it must be

X Primitive Culture, Vol. I.

translated into thought before it can become knowledge. But ' feeling and ideation take place side by side and each modifies "Feelings as such -- pleasures, pains, and mental excitement -- are always incorporated with intellectual states, and by that means, are differentiated, held, sustained and revived! And in one who regards his feelings as the product of relations to external beings, as the primitive man does, the sensations of his dream, the feelings are a main part of the subject matter Even if he be only thinking upon the external of thought. object, memory produces a picture of it, and that picture recalls its unseen qualities, and its main quality is its capacity to produce certain feeling, of which the dreamer is aware. things suffused his mind in feeling, and all his intellectual processes, in relation to this subject, are so submerged (in feeling,

xWundt; pp. 211 and 221.

[&]quot;Baldwin; Hand Book of Psychology, Vol. I, p. 116.

g Bain; The Emotions and the Will, p. 91.

oG. H. Lewes; Problems of Life and Mind, Vol. II, p. 225.

that his thinking is little more than a process of feeling, and his conception of the spiritual being, are really only theories of his feelings. Nor, indeed, does he think of them as separate When they originally appear to him, their from his feelings. appearance brought feeling with it. With every reappearance, either in dream, in memory, or by misinterpretation of actual objective phenomena, those feelings reappear, and it never occurs to him that the two can be separated. He regards his feeling as an attribute of these spiritual beings, and he finds the being in the light of those feelings. So that his religious conceptions are, indeed, little else than a theory of his religious feeling.

That this is true is suggested by many considerations. Religion always retains emotion as a large element. True that emotion is of various types, from that of the Guinea Negro who

beats his gods, upon occasion, or of the New Zealander who threatens to kill and eat his god, to that of the enthusiast who offers himself a living sacrifice. The Congo Negroes live in perpetual terror of the evil spirits, whom they worship. the Christian walks in serene joy at the presence of his Deity. These varying emotions may possibly find their origin in the extreme difficulty of discriminating between certain forms of pleasure and certain forms of pain. The original sensations were so close to the line that separates the two, that they might easily have been put in one class by one individual, and in another These classifications would easily harden. class by another. in the process of tradition. The devotes of each conception. would assimilate to its religious idea those feelings which are

X Peschel: Races of Man, p. 79.

O Bain; The Emotions and the Will, p. 90.

o James; Psychology, Vol. II, p. 545.

oWard; Dynamic Sociology.

of the same class, until there are two fairly definite theories of the religious feelings; one, that they are pleasing, the other, that they are unpleasant. In the one class would be gendered a desire for their repetition, in the other, repugnance to them, two states of mind equally fitted to bring about a repetition of the feelings. Later on in the development of the race, when conceptions of the gods have become definite, and the idea of their supernatural power is expanded, men attribute to them their good or ill in external affairs, according as they have conceived their characters. However, the element of feeling never leaves religion so long as it remains religion. The savage recognizes his religion as consisting largely of feeling, and when he desires a large experience of it he gormandizes, or starves, or dances, or lashes himself into an ecstacy. The enlightened man sits down to quiet contemplation. The savage says his gods take

take possession of him. The Christian that he communes with God. Even the most thoroughly rationalistic of thinkers on religion, have never, intentionally taken from religion its element of feeling, even when they failed to recognize it in word, but have regarded it as flowing from, the religious idea and have therefore duscussed only the idea. "But simple ideas which have no relation to past experiences excite no emotions. They must bring up and reproduce feelings already experienced. In other words, a condition precedent to the awakening of emotion by the contemplation of the religious idea, is the past experience of a like feeling through some actual or imagined relation. this feeling is the essence of natural religion. Dr. Robert Flint says. "Religion is man's communion with what he believes to be God But how can there be communion with what is not ?

x Wooster Quarterly; December, 1896.

S McCosh; The Divine Government, p. 303. Wundt P 371 Theism, p. 32.

And Dr. Flint insists that but one conception of God is well Evidently, he should have said "Religion is a feeling which man attributes to his relation, to what he believes to be, This feeling it is of which the mind lays a God or gods." hold, analyzes as well as it may, and works up into theories of beama Professor Hermann seems to recognize this religious feeling. priority of feeling to idea, when he gives to his late book its But it is Schleiermacher, who while failing to discriminate name. between the true and the false in religion, yet urges the importance of the element of feeling, with most brilliancy and power. Evidently, the discrimination between true and false religion, in the dogmatic sense, is a discrimination between feelings which

xCommunion with God.

[/]Speeches on Religion.

are produced by a real supernatural being, and those which are But it is for its sociological bearing, subjective in origin. rather than for its apologetic ones that I am considering the The fact that religion is primarily a matter of feeling subject. is well understood by the religious propogandista, who always appeals to the feelings. If asked why, he replies that it is the will which he desires to move, and the will is under the He reaches feeling, not by appeals to the dominion of feeling. intelligence, but to the emotions, and to these he appeals by pictures of feeling alternately agreeable, and disagreeable. have seen tremendous feeling, and a multitude converted under the influence of a song, which conveyed no sort of an idea either It simply presented to the mind the religious or otherwise. picture of the exhibition of strong feeling, and thus it produced strong feeling in the listeners.

X Giddings; Principles of Sociology, p. 135. / / McCosh; The Divine Government, p. 303.

We conclude then, that reliaion lays hold of all the elements X

of the soul: intellect, feeling, and will; but that the order.

of this entrance is the order of the development of mind-- first feeling, then intellect. Pelimious feelings first, reliaious ideas second,—and reached in the endeavor to understand the feelings.

XFlint's Theism.

Willis & Banker.

Laurence Kan 1119/18 1897

