

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MANAISM

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I

IN COMMON with every branch of inquiry, the history of religions has been subjected during recent years to notable attempts at revision, and, as often the case in other inquiries, the larger consequences of the revisions have not yet been fully considered. This seems to me to be peculiarly the case in that revision of views which, under the influence of Marett¹ and Levy-Bruhl,² traces the roots of religion not to animism but to manaism.

A generation ago the English anthropologists had apparently succeeded in establishing the view that animism, in the sense of belief in spiritual beings,³ marked the most rudimentary form of religion. The notion that belief in personal spiritual beings could have come originally from primitive men's experiences with shadows, echoes, dreams, sleep, and death was not welcome to the conservatives of that day; but after all, if religion was to be studied at all in evolutionary perspectives, there were a good many points in common between animism and theism. The theist from his advanced position and with his refined doctrines could look across the ages at the primitive animist and regard him as a kindred spirit, a younger brother groping for light. It was the presupposition of animism that primitive mentality was essentially like our own.

More recently other workers, relying upon numerous investigations of primitive peoples and upon a few systematic interpretations

¹ R. R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion* (1914); article, "Mana," in *Here*, Vol. III (1916).

² Levy-Bruhl, *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (1912); *Primitive Mentality*, translated by L. A. Clare (1923).

³ E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 2 volumes (1913). Vol. I, p. 425.

of them, have detected and developed another view, with the presupposition that primitive mentality was different from ours. According to Levy-Bruhl this primitive mentality is predominantly a social or group affair rather than an individual affair; it is pre-perceptual, and characterized by an unbroken transition between what we have subsequently learned to distinguish as subject and object; it is a matter of attitudes and actions rather than of elaborate explanations; and it has not yet brought into focus the sharp distinction which generations of logicians have registered in the law of contradiction. It is in a matrix such as this that primitive men develop the practices and later the beliefs with reference to the mysterious power referred to by the term "mana" and cognate terms.

II

What is the possible significance of such manaism for present-day philosophy? There are at least three points to be settled before the question can be answered with any definiteness. In the first place, there is the objection that the characteristics attributed by Levy-Bruhl to primitive mentality are hard to make clear and difficult to accept; but this very point, according to the sponsors of the manaistic theories, only goes to show that primitive mentality is different from ours. The difficulty can be said to inhere in the very nature of the argument.

There is in the second place the fact that the manaistic interpretation of the data has not convinced some investigators and interpreters. If one finds, with Codrington,⁴ that mana "essentially belongs to personal beings to originate," or concludes, with Miss Campbell,⁵ that mana is essentially a personal power, one has, for our present purposes, only called animism by another name. If manaism has any peculiar significance for constructive thinking, one must proceed according to the view of Marett, and say that in manaism the conceptions of personal and non-personal powers are still

⁴ R. H. Codrington, *The Melanesians—Studies in Their Anthropology and Folk-Lore* (1891), p. 119n.

⁵ I. G. Campbell, "Manaism: A Study in the Psychology of Religion," *American Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 29, p. 1 (1918). Valuable bibliography appended.

in solution⁵ and not yet precipitated; that where manaism exhibits animistic notions the latter are later accretions rather than primary features;⁷ and moreover that it is of no great concern for primitive mentality if practices implying both personal and impersonal powers are carried on in the same group or at the same level.⁸

The third difficulty is found in the method, more common a few years ago than at present, which explains institutions and beliefs solely in terms of their origins. Any one who seeks to read a philosophy of religion in manaism must bear in mind that manaism at its best represents only an almost vanishingly primitive stage of religion.

III

If these preliminary questions can be adjusted provisionally in some such manner as I have indicated, I think the possible significance of manaism can be summed up under four heads. The first may be called methodological. A part of the value of manaism certainly lies in the facility it affords for interpreting other data in the history of religions, particularly that of magic and tabu. This point has been covered by Marett⁹ and needs no further development.

Manaism has a second kind of significance which I would call epistemological. In order for the point to be entertained, manaism must perhaps be taken more seriously than it has sometimes been taken; but if it is taken seriously, it offers a kind of prehistoric protest against John Locke and his successors who have worked so hard for mind's own sake to isolate mind from the world. Locke's assumption that the mind does not know the world, but knows only its sensations of the world, created a gap between mind and world which the Kantians have ever since sought to capitalize, and which the Hegelians and the realists in different ways have tried to close. The history of modern philosophy until recently has been predominantly a series of debates about epistemology and its supposed consequences. The debate is still going on, somewhat diminished in intensity because the problems of the natural sciences and of industry

⁶ R. R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion*, p. 119.

⁷ Same, article, "Mana," *Here*, Vol. III, p. 377.

⁸ Same, p. 378f.

⁹ Same, p. 378f.

alike demand more direct action upon the environment. Manaism indicates that for primitive men there was no great gulf between mind and world; the senses were, so to speak, transparent, and action was overt. Manaism here, as elsewhere, affords only the barest of answers; but at least it may serve to help pose the question whether the reflective theories of knowledge are not over-reflective, and whether they do not distort our situation rather than clarify it.

When one begins to discredit reflective theories because they are reflective, one gravitates rather naturally towards intuitionism. The kinship between Levy-Bruhl's pre-logical mentality and Bergson's intuitionism is noticeable, particularly in the matter of the reconciliation of contradictories.¹⁰ But if manaism points toward intuitionism at all, I think it should be made clear that it points toward important modifications in Bergson's doctrine. Bergson's intuitionism is individualistic and non-practical; manaism represents attitudes toward the environment assumed by groups, and first for practical rather than for theoretical or ideal interests.

Perhaps, in the third place, one may discern in manaism a hint for dealing with present-day psychological problems. Everyone has to reckon, in one way or another, with extreme behaviorism and its reduction of mentality to physiology, and with the emergent theory of mind and its derivation of mental functions from bodily processes. The hint which manaism affords here is hard to state in words which will not be misleading; perhaps it can be phrased thus: We are to find out about the world around us, not merely through avenues of psychology and epistemology (as ordinarily treated) but also of physiology. Knowledge involves not merely mentality, but also vitality. Irving King has called manaism a biological attitude;¹¹ and on the other hand, Patrick has called attention to the fact that the old lines on which the mind-body problem was argued are being obliterated by the newer investigations in physiology and psychology.¹² Manaism is of course rudimentary and hopelessly crude; but at least it is the attitude of men who do not live by taking thought alone. It is neither wholly practical nor wholly speculative; this is perhaps the reason why it appeals to neither of two prominent current and rather divisive philosophies. But, like an organ-

¹⁰ See L. Levy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality*, pp. 60, 93, 443. Compare also H. Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by T. E. Hulma (1912) p. 39f.

¹¹ I. King, *The Development of Religion* (1910), p. 149.

¹² G. T. W. Patrick, "The Emergent Theory of Mind," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 19, p. 706 (1922).

ism which is neither animal nor plant, it still possesses a modicum of vitality and exhibits an astonishing persistence.

Most important, I think, is the possible metaphysical bearing of manatism. Let us suppose, in accordance with views sketched above, that thinking, although it represents a high level of development, is nevertheless a late development and on the whole is secondary and derivative. Clear thinking develops in a matrix or a medium which is not clear. I think that we may extend the principle, and say that theism, with its thought-out doctrines of God although it represents a high level of development, is secondary and derivative, and *when it develops, leaves something of value behind*. A great difficulty with the historic doctrines of theism seems to be that they are too finely-drawn. Like certain medieval paintings of men's souls, their very clearness for us defeats their purpose. This was of course the case with our oft-mentioned childhood ideas of God as "a Big Man up in the sky," but the difficulty nowadays is more ominous. We are now facing the possibility that it may apply also to our elaborate and sophisticated doctrines of God as a Big Mind up in the sky, or as a Cosmic or Super-Cosmic Mind. Most naturalists agree with this statement, but without recognizing the fact to which manatism bears witness—namely, that what is left behind as theism develops may be both vital and persistent.

If this is the suggestion of manatism, certainly it would give new point to the familiar preachment that "religion is a life." It would further, reinforce widespread current tendencies to regard traditional distinctions between matter and spirit as overdrawn. And it would give a world-wide aboriginal basis for the view which, perhaps after long eclipse, is beginning to loom up again with imposing grandeur upon the horizons of religion—the view, namely, that the true object of religion is the stupendous universe around us. The suggestion of manatism might be that even though theism is secondary and derivative, atheism in any narrow sense is equally secondary and derivative: both alike crystallize out from an original solution. Nor is the original solution properly describable as pantheism: to call it pantheism, or to call it anything else, is more like attempting to recover the original solution by placing one hard crystal beside the other and weighing the two together. Properly speaking, religion should never be defined or described; but only religious men should attempt to define or describe other things.

Finally, manism, more than anything else since developed, reflects a certain paganism residual and latent in all the religions, a paganism which theism by its very loftiness has overshadowed, or else by its definiteness has relegated to the realm of esthetics. Manism does not afford a philosophy of religion, any more than a cry affords a language or a horde a civilization. But it may serve to set the problem of a philosophy of religion in more inclusive terms, and to remind us of once unbroken relations between religion, the universe, and the life and mind of man.