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Attitude toward "nature" as seen through History.  
A./ Nature meaning outside world.

Before entering the problem as outlined, I will presume that it is granted, to some extent, that even our most private attitudes are influenced by society and are, to that extent, a result of social processes, i.e. of history.

There are several attitudes possible toward "nature" in the above sense, and the most important are: Primitive realism, i.e. taking things for what they seem to the senses, absolute idealism, i.e. denial of reality to anything transmitted through the senses, absolute positivism, i.e. taking all things to be of the same class of reality, combinations of these three, which all have in common the basic assumption of knower and known being separate. And, on the other hand, the syncretic feeling of oneness with the outside world.

Speaking broadly and disregarding very essential details, I think it may be said that through its history and ever since Humanity lost its primitive realism, it pursued the dualistic attitude in the West and the syncretic in the east. We are, to such an extent, products of our civilization, and are so far away from the common source, that I do not believe we can very intelligently speak about the Oriental attitude at all. I think, however, that, if we are to understand the sources of our own attitude, we have to contrast it with the Oriental. If we do not do so, we might be misled into believing some of our reactions to be human, when they are merely Western. This would be a serious mistake exactly because of our bias to distinguish "natural" from "rational" phenomena.

I have taken the courage to the sweeping generalisation about the basic metaphysical difference between East and West from the following consideration. When it is discovered, in the course of development, that our senses are not altogether to be trusted, because they seem to communicate different degrees of reality as sensations, memories, dreams, hallucinations etc, the world, previously taken uncritically to be simply the raw material of life, becomes a bewildering muddle apparently partly existing of its own accord, partly created by us and partly a mixture of both. However such a picture of the world is highly unsatisfactory because if it were so there would be no possibility to react intelligently to it, that means to be able to predict with any degree of probability what results any actions of ours may have. Therefore the problem arising from the fact that the world seems to be made up of different kinds of realities has been solved in Western civilization by denying this difference and in Eastern civilization by allotting to every level of reality a systematic value. By the way I suggest that primitive cultures when faced with the problem do not tackle it but accept the world as it seems to be and this is exactly why they differ from a civilization.

It may be seen that an attitude ascribing to the outside world only one degree of reality will have a very <sup>strong</sup> logical bias and I will try in the following to explain why this must be so. On the other hand the attitude which accepts varying degrees of reality but assigns places of value to each of them will have a strong ethical bias. I do not profess to understand how the world appears to anyone with such an ethical attitude. It is far too foreign to anything I am accustomed to and have been brought up with. But if I do not understand the basis I can at least understand the difference in the results from those reached in the West. My argument goes probably also the other way round. I can see the results of the East are different from the West, and try to explain these differences by ascribing to the East a basically different metaphysical outlook. But even if this is true it will be an explanation as good as any other as long as it works.

The results of a metaphysical outlook with an ethical bias if compared to the products of our own civilization may be said briefly, as follows: Our religion, which, as I said, centered around man as opposed to nature, rather ~~concerned~~ than concerned, as for the Chinese for example, with man and nature alike, will seem to the Oriental superficial and impious. The dogmatic parts of it which are really camouflaged science will seem to him incomprehensible nonsense. The mystical part of it they will seem to him rude, primitive without any appropriate technique and consequently impractical. The whole idea of a personal god as distinct from his creation will seem to him pagan. He will far better understand the Pantheon of the Greeks than the divinity of the Tomists. And to him our whole development from polytheism of the natural phenomena to the supernatural divinity will look like one steady decline to barbarity. It will prove to him how we have travelled away from a primitive true religious feeling into the deprived mistake, of uncivilized ~~abstract~~ abstractions.

His own religion is to us a mixture of stupidly complicated paganism and unpreoccupied cheerful atheism without doctrine, but with a complicated liturgy and with a technique based on superstition which would be silly if it would not at times produce results which we can not explain. But in spite of this unsystematic muddle of oriental religions many of which most of us would not be even inclined to call religion, we have a feeling of awe. We feel that capacities common to everyman are being utilized in the East which we are unable to utilize because they do not fit into the world as we see it.

The activities we call scientific and which, at times, we feel to be the central theme of our civilisation, he will be unable to understand at all. He will therefore be probably inclined to class them together with our economic activities and will be highly amused to observe how much work we spend in labor saving. Since, due to his ethical bias, to him every activity has just one meaning, namely to lead to the good life /for he is the true pragmatic/ the only sense he will be able to make out of our science is the effort to work less and have more comfort. This is why we must look to him like obsessed savages spending incredible effort on the discovery of what makes water boil, without even knowing how to drink tea. On the other hand, the central theme of his civilisation, namely politeness and good manners, is almost certainly misunderstood by most of us. I do not profess to understand it, but maybe it is what corresponds to our science. Maybe it represents the highest wisdom of the milleniar development and is, in a sense, the science of how to live.

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