

Glass Pane World View

In creating and living in the world of cultural story, the Dream Animal has journeyed far out of the forest, out of nature. The Dream Animal is separated and estranged from the natural world in two fundamental ways. First, by creating the artificial world of culture, the Dream Animal has erected a shield that more or less mediates and cushions the direct forces of nature from him. It is a shield made up of technological and social fibers. Second, the symbolic process itself necessarily presupposes a separation between the referent and a unit of reference, i.e., between something and something else. In such a process there are an observer and an observed, a self and an other, a subject and an object. It is a shield predicated on the very ability of the Dream Animal to symbolize. The Dream Animal is thus forever set apart from the natural world.

For the Dream Animal, the cultural story of the "setting apart from the natural world" gave birth to six primary and interrelated values. While less apparent in the early history of humanity, with the passage of time, these values would come to fruition and pervade all aspects of the cultural story of the Dream Animal, from the social, ideological, psychological and ecological domains to the ethos and persona. The degree to which these six values influence and are expressed in any given individual, group or society will, of course, vary greatly. Each of the six values can be identified, embedded in the story texts of this workbook. The values are: objectification, gradation, quantitation, secularization, progression and reduction. While the terminology may be new to the reader, the concepts referred to should not be. In fact, each term is rather elemental, and thus inclusive of other, more readily identifiable values.

Each of these six values represents what has become associated with the desirable, an ideal to be sought, and not necessarily what is. Judgements are predicated on them; actions strive to bring them about in people's lives. But judgements and actions as with values sometimes fall short of their ideals and goals.

Objectification refers to a process of presupposing and establishing an autonomous, separate world. There is a reality "out there," an "otherness." And that reality is made up of "objects" existing independent of human and divine influences, and independent of thought and spirit. The body and the mind are distinct and separate. Man and God can from afar observe the workings of this objective reality, but its operations are dependent on neither man nor God. Birds, mammals, trees, landscape, mountains--all the "stuff of nature" and all conceptualized as "objects"--have an autonomy of their own. As Newton proposed, the universe is governed by its own autonomous "Laws of Motion." The "stuff of nature" is compartmentalized into its assigned place, separate from humanity. The domestication of plants and animals, and building of the "walls of Jericho," separating the "wild" from the "civilized," were early expressions of this sort of objectification. "Wildness" and "wilderness" thus come into being. And even among a single, separate species, its members can become separate from each other. Hence the rise of social class distinctions, as expressed at Jericho, of "individualism," as noted by Tocqueville, and of "self-interest," as established by Smith in his fundamental principles of "laissez-faire capitalism." To term a phenomenon an "object" is to ultimately render that phenomenon distinct and separate from the whole. In so doing, that phenomenon can now be "analyzed." And in so doing, that phenomenon can now be brought under "dominion."

Gradation refers to a process of presupposing and establishing a hierarchical relationship with the "other," which is, in turn, conceptualized as subordinate. Be it nature or even another human group, the "other" is often assigned distinguishing characteristics thought of as inferior by the dominant group. Rights and privileges are only granted to a few. The trees and animals of a forest are afforded no rights of their own. In its most extreme expression, the "other" is approached as if to be subdued and controlled. "Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven and every living thing that moves upon the earth." In turn, the "other" has value and worth to the extent that it benefits mankind. The human is the "caretaker of his garden," a garden whose purpose is to benefit its caretaker. A forest of trees is to be made into various products for human consumption--lumber for houses and furniture, parks for recreation and fishing; a forest is made into a "natural resource." In contrast, "wilderness" is given further meaning as a wasteland of "no use" that can, in fact, threaten the very vitality and integrity of the cultivated land. "Wildness" must be subjugated, if not eliminated.

It is ironic that the contemporary "environmental" and "wise-use" movements, while espousing entirely opposite views on the value of wilderness, are both predicated on the very same pivotal values, those of objectification and gradation.¹ Both view natural "wilderness" as somehow separate from and in many respects the antithesis of human "civilization." It is only in their reversal of gradation that the distinction between the two positions emerges. While admittedly speaking in oversimplified terms, for the environmentalist, in wilderness can be found the pure, the noble and the beautiful, a place of inspiration, renewal and the possibility of salvation for humanity; in civilization can be found the dangerous, the corrupt and the vile elements of the world. In contrast and often shrouded in Christian references, for the wise-use advocate, in civilization can be found industry, well-being, progress and hope, and the possibility of forging out the Kingdom of God; while in wilderness can be found either "no use" or a natural resource to take dominion over. And if not controlled, the wilds can corrupt and destroy. Wilderness becomes a place of danger from which the Devil will tempt.

Quantitation refers to a world that is entirely knowable to humans, a world knowable in terms of mechanical, numerical elements. The "other" is quantified. The elementary components of the world are discrete and discernible. There need not be any mystery. Eventually man will learn the secrets of the universe. We have already learned its language, and as stated by Pythagoras, Galileo and Bronowski, that language is the language of numbers. The "life" of an animal and the animal itself are precisely and analytically defined, understood in terms of specific chemical and biological processes, and of its quantifiable actions and dimensions. To know the world, then, is to rely upon the experiences and rigors of the human intellect. Empiricism and rationalism predominate.

²The "wise-use" movement began in the 1980s as a grass-roots movement of primarily western-states ranchers, timber workers, private-property activists, and conservative republicans. Followers advocate opening up of protected public lands for private use and oppose most forms of governmental regulation. It is felt that only the private property owner is best suited to manage natural resources, having "its best interests at heart."

Secularization refers to the process of envisioning a world devoid of spiritual significance. In its most overt expression, there is no divinity; there is no transcendent within the world. The source for inspiration, the archetypes to guide humanity, is not to be found in the transcendent. There are no souls in animals, nor perhaps, in humanity. If there is an acknowledgement of a divinity, it is of divinity that may have created the world and set it in motion, but it has since left it alone to its own devices. The "other" is primarily material substance, governed by the "Laws of Motion."

Progression refers to the view that through time the human condition develops into more perfect states. Implicit are the notions of lineal time and of advancement. Time is conceptualized with a past, a present and a future. History is made possible. Advancement presupposes that "what was" is necessarily inferior to "what is" and "what will be" is superior to "what is." New is better. The development of the individual, as echoed by Maslow, and of the entirety of humanity, as Spencer and Marx wrote, are conceptualized as a progression from immature to mature, from basic "survival needs" to "self-actualization," from primitive to civilized, be it "classless" or "capitalist" society. And what is to be known in the world is what is to be discovered anew, or to be invented. The old theory is surpassed by the improved. And a new physics awaits; Einstein was convinced of it.

Reduction refers to the view that there is "one true reality," and that reality is vested in material forms and objects. The material world is the world acknowledged. Literalism and reductionism pervade the thinking about the "other." As Marx proposed, the "modes of production" of a society, or as Smith maintained, the material "self-interest," or as Spencer held, the "survival of the fittest," becomes the driving force of our humanity. For Locke, to know is to have a verifiable and replicative experience, to "touch" the material objects, to be empirical. And there can be no other way of knowing the world. A "flower" is reduced to its "natural qualities," be it biologically described by the scientist or literally represented by the artist.

Another expression of reductionist thinking is found in the conviction that eventually there will be a singular, unified theory predictive of the structure and process of the universe. This universe is defined as the natural world of physical entities; all will be reduced to the truth of this singular explanation. Galileo and Newton were convinced of it.

Reduction not only refers to the process in which the material object referred to by the theory is the "truth," but the theory itself is also reified as a material object and as truth. The theory, in fact, often becomes more "real" than that which it refers to. This is the case when it is asserted that "the written word is the literal truth," or when it is assumed that "the theory of inertia is the law causing inertia." The apple fell because of the "law of gravity." In these instances, the unit of reference becomes the referent. That which the symbol refers to is given a concreteness and reality of its own. It is as if a gourmet chef, who, with great deliberateness, follows his recipe book and then adds one final ingredient to his cuisine, the ripped up pages of the recipe book!

Reduction is perhaps the ultimate expression of human separation from the world, the total emphasis on and enclosure within the reality fabricated by human symbolic activity, by theory championed as truth. The theory is the reality.

In attempting to be "set apart from the world," the Dream Animal thus seeks independence from the "other," from the world about it. The Dream Animal erects "walls" and views the world as if through a "glass pane." The "stone" separates. The more distance achieved, the greater the control and dominion obtained. With control comes the enhancement of the Dream Animal's material well-being. A "rich man" is measured in terms of competition and survival, and in the "things" he alone has acquired. The more accumulated, the richer the man. It's a self-reliant, solitary road the "rich man" travels. Only a privileged few are vested with and granted "ideas" and moral rights. With the "individual," so goes the welfare of the community. Humanity looks out from an ever-expanding world of its own fabrication over an ever-increasing barrier into the world of the "other." It is the "other" of the overt, the literal, the material forms. The "stone" is inanimate. It is the "other" knowable only through the rigorous applications of precise methodologies governed by the analytical mind of man. And once known, it is the "other" brought under "dominion." The quest is to the summit of the mountain and, once there, to look down upon the conquered rocks far below. What then is to be feared most is to fall from the mountain top and to participate in the "wildness" below. What is to be feared is the loss of separation from the world. The values of objectification, gradation, quantitation, secularization, progression and reduction have helped define and, in turn, constitute the world as if seen through a "glass pane," the Glass Pane world view.