THE FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPT OF THE PRIMITIVE PHILOSOPHY.

THOSE who have undertaken to set forth systematically the essential features of the religion of undeveloped man have commonly made much of the anthropomorphic character of the primitive *Weltanschauung*. Man's earliest and most natural hypothesis concerning the causes of the phenomena presented in his experience was—we are often told—that the action of external objects upon himself was referable to the same kind of causation as that which he knew to be the explanation of his own action upon external objects; namely, to conscious volition. He is therefore represented as instinctively projecting his own personality and consciousness into the things and forces around him; and primitive religion is described as involving essentially the reduplication of the directly known society of visible human persons by a less directly known society of more or less superhuman persons, present in the objects and agencies of nature; to which, of course, must be added the innumerable company of ghosts. Thus the late Dr. Brinton has declared that “the psychic origin of all religion is. . . the assumption that conscious volition is the source of all force, and that man is in communication with it.”¹ And Guyau has insisted that “the religious sentiment has its beginning in the world at the moment in which the idea of mechanical necessity gives

¹ *Religions of Primitive Peoples*, p. 47.

place to the idea of a sort of moral and social reciprocity—at the moment in which there arises the conception of a possible *exchange* of feelings and even of desires, a kind of sociability, between men and the cosmic powers, whatever they may be.”² It was, of course, Mr. Tylor who first made widely familiar, and illustrated by a wide range of examples, the view that the dominant characteristic of early thought was the belief in the universal animation of nature, that “the operations of the world seemed [to primitive man] to be carried on by other spirits, just as the human body was held to live and act by virtue of its own inhabiting spirit-soul.” Since the publication of Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1871) the theory that the ruling hypothesis by which the savage explains his experiences is a sort of anthropomorphic animism, has been an accepted commonplace of ethnology. Even the small group of theorists who follow Mr. Spencer and Mr. Grant Allen in tracing all spirits back to ghosts, agree, at all events, in conceiving the religion of the natural races as consisting chiefly in transactions between persons—between living persons and deceased persons—under the forms natural to personal relationship, i. e., propitiation, entreaty, bargain, alliance, friendship or cajolery.

Now this anthropomorphic aspect of savage thought is, of course, undeniably a real aspect. But with the steady accumulation of fuller and more accurate ethnographic material in recent years, it has become increasingly evident that there is another still more important and pervasive—and perhaps earlier—element of the primitive philosophy. This element, however, though more or less casually recognized by several recent writers on primitive religion and folk-lore, has been far less adequately emphasized and less systematically set forth than has the theory of animism. It has hitherto, for the most part, been given

² *Irreligion de l'avenir*, p. v, vi.

neither the definiteness nor the degree of importance that it can actually be shown to possess in the savage man's scheme of the universe. That scheme, though it is, of course, full of the oddest self-contradictions, is no mere haphazard collection of unrelated superstitions; it has a curious logic of its own, which it is not impossible to unravel. The present paper is the first chapter in a study which undertakes to set forth, with rather more system and connectedness than has elsewhere been attempted, the nature, bearings, and diverse applications in custom and rite, of the central conception of early human thought, so far as that conception is brought to light in the religious and magical vocabulary and practices of savage races within historic times. This study is less an attempt to add to the sum of ethnological data, than to correlate and bring out more fully the significance of certain data that are, for the greater part, familiar to ethnologists.

For the sake of clearness, let me, at the outset, lay down somewhat dogmatically, and somewhat too categorically, what seems to be the essence of that central conception in the savage view of the world; the evidence which shall verify, and the qualifications which must hedge about, the theory, will be better understood if the broad outlines of it are first of all made plain. There is, I desire to show, a category which is yet more fundamental in the savage mind than that of personality. Behind all their anthropomorphism there is in the thinking of many or most races at this stage of culture, an idea of the nature of things and of the causation of events, which is distinctly impersonal and quasi-mechanical. With something approaching uniformity we find, as the underlying and all-controlling preconception in the thought of savages, a belief of which the following propositions express the essential features: that there is present in nature a diffused and inter-connected impersonal energy or vital force, some *quantum*

of which is possessed by all or most things or persons; that the amount of this energy is more or less fixed or limited; that any unusual, striking or alarming power, ability or productivity in anything is evidence of the special presence of this force; that it is localized in different natural objects, or possessed by different persons, in varying degrees; that the most important property of anything consists in the amount of this energy which inheres in it; that portions of such vital energy may be transferred from one person or thing to another, and may be controlled, regulated, insulated, by various devices, usually of a mechanical sort; that contact between a person or object highly charged with this energy and one less highly charged with it will, without the volition of either, produce, as it were, an explosion of vital force highly dangerous to the weaker party, and it may be to both; that the chief end of man is to get possession and control of this force; and that the chief utility of an immense variety of rites lies in the manipulation of it.

Now much of this would be recognized by many anthropologists as roughly corresponding to ideas that are verifiably present in savage thought; but a good many, I imagine, would at the same time make two objections. It would be objected, first, that savages cannot be supposed to have conceptions either so abstract or so consequential and coherent as the foregoing propositions suggest; and, second, that, in any case, these conceptions have to do, not with primitive religion, but with one phase of savage magic. I hope, however, eventually to make it evident that though savage man does not formulate his creed in any such body of propositions, his thought, as shown both in language and customs, often follows with remarkable consistency and thoroughness, the lines of the propositions that I have set down, and that with the help of the fundamental conception mentioned, a great diversity of customs not

hitherto well explained become connectedly intelligible. And against those theorists—amongst whom Mr. Frazer seems to have placed himself—who insist upon a sharp distinction between primitive magic and primitive religion, I shall maintain that the distinction cannot, upon any good ethnological grounds, be made out, in any such fashion as to exclude the conception of “diffusive and transferable life-energy” from a determinative influence upon those beliefs and observances commonly recognized as religious, as truly as upon those customarily classified as merely magical.

It can be shown that the conception in question is the most nearly ubiquitous, most all-pervasive and most influential of the notions characteristic of early man’s thinking; a notion beside which all anthropomorphic ideas are of secondary, though still of great, significance. Among many undeveloped races the one great practical concern of the individual, the all-important business that chiefly engrosses his imagination, controls his activities and accounts for by far the greater part of his so-called religious customs and observances, is the endeavor to absorb into his person as much of this force, or to get into his possession as many objects charged with it, as possible, while at the same time insulating himself against it at those moments when its excessive quantity or unstable equilibrium makes it dangerous. In a word, the dominant preoccupation, probably, of most savages, is, not to “cultivate friendly relations with supernatural beings,” but to get into such *well-adjusted, quasi-mechanical relations with the source of supernatural energy*, that they may control the greatest possible amount of it for the benefit of themselves, their family, clan, village or tribe. And when, and in so far as, savage man does undertake to deal with his environment by setting up regular personal relations with definitely anthropomorphic nature-spirits, he is still under the

influence of the same preoccupation. Those spirits are "divine," or what Mr. F. B. Jevons calls "supernatural," chiefly because the savage finds reason to credit them with the possession of a very uncommon amount of the energy upon which all power depends. What the savage chiefly wants from them is a transfusion into himself, or his clan, of some of their energy; and meanwhile, those divine spirits are often conceived as needing an occasional, or periodical, renewal of their forces, through various revitalizing processes for the performance of which the spirits continue to be wholly or partly dependent upon man.

* * *

In any inquiry concerning the existence, importance and meaning of such a conception, the first question that it is natural to ask is whether peoples in the state of savagery can be shown to have in their vocabulary words expressing the general concept of such a universal, impersonal, communicable energy. It is this first stage of the inquiry only which is presented in the present paper. I have brought together from a number of sources, old and new, testimonies to the existence of such words in the language of at least three typical savage races—the North Americans, the races of Oceania, and the Bantu—and evidence that these words are the most important in the religious vocabularies of the peoples in question, being commonly, but erroneously, taken, by those who have written of those peoples to mean "god" or "spirit." The consideration of these linguistic usages not only establishes the existence in the savage mind of the rather abstract idea under consideration, but also throws a good deal of light upon the connotation and correlations of that idea and its place in primitive thought. I bring these testimonies together here, not because they are complete, but rather with the hope of eliciting more of the same kind

from collectors of anthropological material, and especially from philologists and from ethnographers in the field.

I. NORTH AMERICANS.

Some North American stocks have words—*manitou* among the Algonkins, *oki* among the Iroquois, *wakonda* among the Dakotas—which, as nearly as they can be reduced to any single English equivalent, appear to mean “power” or “productive energy” in the abstract, which are applied also in the concrete to any person or thing exhibiting an unusual degree of force of any sort, and which constitute the most commonly used terms in the religious vocabularies of these peoples. It was through the mis-translation of these by the English word “god,” and through the misapprehension of the peculiar abstract use of them in the singular number, that there arose the once-prevalent belief, now well known to be erroneous, that the Indians recognized a single “Great Spirit.”

1. *Dakotan Tribes.* In the case of the Dakotan word we have very clear and trustworthy information as to its use and real meaning. Thus Mr. McGee (*15th Report, U. S. Bureau of Ethnology*, p. 182) writes that among these tribes “the sun is *wakanda*—not *the wakanda*, or a *wakanda*, but simply *wakanda*; the moon is *wakanda*, and so are thunder, lightning, the stars, the winds, the cedar; even a man, especially a *shaman*, might be *wakanda*. In addition, the term was applied to mythic monsters of the earth, air and waters, to . . . fetishes and ceremonial objects, . . . many animals. . . many natural objects, and places of striking character.” “The term,” Mr. McGee goes on to suggest, “may be translated into ‘mystery’ perhaps more satisfactorily than in any other single English word, yet this rendering is at the same time too limited, as *wakanda* vaguely denotes also power, sacred, ancient, grandeur, animate, immortal.” Mr. McGee does not attempt to dis-

tinguish between the essential meaning of the word and its secondary connotations; but the rather curious list of partial synonyms which he gives, affords a fairly clear indication of the nature of the idea that lies behind. Still more clearly is the meaning brought out by Miss Fletcher in her valuable paper "On the Import of the Totem Among the Omahas."³ "The foundation of the Indian's faith in the efficacy of the totem," says Miss Fletcher, "rested upon his belief concerning the nature of life. This belief was complex and involved two prominent ideas: first, that all things animate and inanimate were permeated by a common life; and second, that this life could not be broken, but was continuous. The idea of a common life was in its turn complex, but its dominating force was that which man recognizes within himself as will-power. This power which makes or brings to pass, he named *Wakonda*. The question arises, did the Omaha regard *Wakonda* as a Supreme Being? There is no evidence that he did so. . . . The word *Wakonda* seems to have expressed the Indian's idea of immanent life manifest in all things. . . . All things were distinct from man, but in the subtle bond of a common life, embodying the idea of will or directive energy, they were akin to him and could lend him the aid of their special powers, even as he could help or hinder his fellow-men. We trace the Omaha's estimate of his own will-power in the act called *Wa-zhin-dhe-dhe* (*wa-zhin*, directive energy, *dhe-dhe*, to send) in which, through the singing of certain songs, strength could be sent to the absent warrior to help him in the stress of battle, or thought and will be projected to an absent friend to help him in a game or race. . . . A similar ability to aid or injure was attributed to the elements and to all natural forces." I am disposed to think that the special identity of *wakonda* with will-power

³ *Proceedings of the Amer. Assoc. for the Advancement of Science*, 1897, p. 326.

is overstated here, if by will be meant conscious and purposive volition. Miss Fletcher's own examples, as well as Mr. McGee's, seem to me clearly to show that, in the Omaha's thinking, will-power falls as a special case under the general notion of *wakonda* as productive energy—"that which makes or brings to pass"—rather than *vice versa*. There is, in Miss Fletcher's exposition, just the *souççon* of a tendency to read the categories of modern psychology and philosophy into the Omaha's vocabulary, and to make of the Indian somewhat too much of a Schopenhauerian pantheist, conceiving of *die Welt als Wille*. But so far as the main point is concerned, the passage cited gives us unimpeachable testimony to the existence among the Dakotan tribes of a distinct and rather abstract conception of a diffused, all-pervasive, invisible, manipulable and transferable life-energy or universal force. And Miss Fletcher's paper in its entirety makes it evident that, amongst these Indians, all success, strength or prosperity is conceived to depend upon the possession of *wakonda* in sufficient quantity.

In the case of the Dakotas we have also, as it happens, evidence which enables us to connect the name, and the idea, of *wakonda* (the import of which we have just seen) directly with one of the most important and widespread of primitive beliefs—the belief, namely, in the "supernatural" or magical powers inherent in the body of woman, especially at the catamenial periods. Everywhere amongst savage peoples, as we know, "the blood is the life"; and one of the most striking evidences of the presence of a special measure of vital energy the savage imagination finds in the mysterious sanguinary discharge characteristic of the child-bearing sex—which for primitive man undoubtedly meant originally the sex which alone had any essential part in the production of new human living beings. Now there are, as every student of savage custom knows, two

sides to the all but universal belief concerning the menstruant woman. On the one hand, she is dangerous to come near—especially for men—and radiates, as it were, an alarming sort of electricity; hence numerous taboos, and the almost world-wide custom of segregating women at such periods. But on the other hand, she is the source of a beneficent fecundating energy which can be transferred from her person to other things, especially to growing crops; hence the widespread “nudity charm,” in which she marches naked by night (usually at certain phases of the moon) over the newly-planted field, for the purpose of ensuring fertility to the seed buried there. Now concerning the Omahas we are informed that they spoke of the discharges by the name *wakondithican*, meaning “pertaining to *wakonda*” (Dorsey, *Omaha Sociology*, p. 267); a woman during this period was segregated, and if any should eat with her they would become sick and their blood would turn black. Her proximity was held to be especially dangerous to young children. On the other hand, as every reader of Longfellow’s *Hiawatha* knows, the use of the nudity-charm was customary among the Dakotas. It is described by Schoolcraft in his *Indian Tribes* (V, p. 70), where the connection of ideas between the *wakondithican* and the transferring of strength and fertility to the grain is sufficiently clear. Schoolcraft, it is true, represents the charm as primarily a protection against insects and blight, but it is probable that the idea was rather that of a direct projection of *wakonda* from the woman’s body to the seed;—possessing that energy. the seed could resist the attacks of all its natural enemies. We have an earlier account than Schoolcraft’s of a Dakotan fecundating ceremony in which the nudity-charm figures, where the conception of the transference of *wakonda* from woman to seed is unmistakably involved. A description of the corn-planting customs of the Osages is given

in a little French book published in 1827, *Histoire de la tribu des Osages*, by "M. V. P." The author of the book got his information from a party of Osages who were brought to Paris early in the last century. His report gives internal evidence of being honest and careful, and, so far as the external facts of custom are concerned, trustworthy; his translations of Dakotan terms, and his interpretations of his facts must, of course, be corrected by the later information that we have from Dorsey, McGee and Miss Fletcher. What "M. V. P." tells us is this: Women alone had charge of the corn-planting. When the time for planting came they went out naked at sun-rise [possibly this is an error, and should be "before sun-rise"] carrying a small quantity of seed-corn and invoked "*Houack-anda*" in these words: "The time has come for placing our corn in the ground; make fertile the corn that we here bring before thee!" For, as our author tells us, "les Osages croient en Dieu, qu'ils adorent sous le nom de Houackanda, que l'on peut traduire ainsi, 'Maître-de-la-vie.'" The ceremony was repeated on five consecutive mornings; then the grains thus fecundated were mixed with the rest of the seed-corn, and after allowing five more days for the power to spread through the whole of the grain, the women planted the corn in the confident expectation of an abundant harvest. This was very likely supplemented by the further nudity charm of marching by night over the planted field.

Now we know from Mr. Mc Gee and Miss Fletcher that *wakonda* does not mean a Supreme Being nor a personal spirit; and for M. V. P.'s translation *Maître-de-la-vie* we must substitute the impersonal "source of life-energy." But the translation of the French writer is just such as a European, imbued with theistic preconceptions, would be sure to give after hearing Indians try to explain what they meant by the term. M. V. P., again, represents

the words of the Indian women as a prayer; we must, making a similar correction, rather regard it as an incantation for putting *wakonda* into the seeds. And finally, he mentions the nudity of the women only incidentally; whereas, from all that we know about the nudity-charm, we may be quite sure that it was the essential feature of the whole ceremony. But when we make these corrections, and when we put these several items of information about the Dakotan tribes together, we get pretty clear evidence that *wakonda* was, amongst other things, conceived to be present in an especially great degree in the blood and in the person of the menstruant woman; that it had, when thus present in exceptional degree, both a dangerous and a beneficent aspect; and that in the latter aspect, it was a principle of fertility and vitality common alike to human and vegetal life, and transferable from the one to the other.

2. *Algonkins and Iroquois.* That a conception parallel to that of *wakonda* was expressed by the Algonkin word *manitou* and the Iroquois *oki* seems evident even from the superficial and unsympathetic observations of seventeenth century missionaries and explorers. Thus writes Roger Williams in his *Key to the Languages of America* (1643)⁴: "There is a general custom among them at the apprehension of any excellency in men, women, birds, beasts, fishes, etc, to cry out *Manitto*, that is, it is a god; as thus, if they see one man excel others in valor, strength, activity, etc., they cry out *Manitto*, a god. And therefore when they talk amongst themselves of the English ships and great buildings, and especially of books and letters, they will end thus: *Manittôwock*, they are gods; *Cummanitto*, you are a god." The Apostle to the Indians does not, to be sure, find in the linguistic usage that he thus describes quite the same significance that it has for

⁴ *Collections of the R. I. Hist. Soc.*, I.

the purposes of the present paper, but pleasantly and piously views it as evidence that "there is a strong conviction naturall in the soul of man that God is filling all things and places, and that all excellencies dwell in God and proceed from him, and that they only are blest who have Jehovah for their portion."

It is not the first nor the last time in history that very edifying reflections have been begotten of a bad translation. *Manitou*, upon Roger Williams' showing, evidently does not mean "a god," in the personal sense, but was applied to any manifestation of extraordinary power, or to any person or thing supposed to possess such power. Champlain still earlier (1616)⁵ bears witness to a similar usage among both Iroquois and Algonkins—though he draws from it a less edifying moral than does the benevolent Baptist. By a delightfully naive *jeu de mots* the explorer seriously seeks to make it appear that *oki* and *manitou* must mean "the Devil." It is better to give the passage in Champlain's own French:

"Ce qui fait plustost croire estre le Diable, qu'ils entendent, est que lors qu'ils voyent un homme faisant quelque chose extraordinaire, ou est plus habille que le commun, ou bien est vaillant guerrier, ou d'ailleurs en furie, comme hors de sa raison et de soy-mesme, ils l'appellent *Oqui*, comme si nous disions, un grand esprit sçavant, ou un grand Diable. Quoy que ce soit, ils ont de certaines personnes qui sont les *Oqui*, ou *Manitous*, ainsi appelez par les Algommequins, et ceste sorte de gens sont les Médecins pour guarir les Mallades, et pençer les Blessés." Compare with this a passage from Théodat's *Grand voyage au pays des Hurons*,⁶ which I translate as literally as is necessary:

"They have some respect towards those spirits that

⁵ *Œuvres*, IV, p. 86.

⁶ Paris, 1632, p. 230.

they call *Oki*; but this word *Oki* signifies a great *Devil*, just as well as a great Angel, a furious and demoniacal spirit (or mind, *esprit*) just as well as a spirit that is good, wise or inventive, that knows or does something beyond the ordinary. Thus they often called us by this name, because we knew and taught them things which went beyond their understandings, as they said. They also called their medicine-men and magicians *Oki*, and even those amongst them who were insane, mad, or possessed." For one more early piece of evidence concerning the use of the words *oki* and *manitou*, I add a passage from Bresani's *Breve Relatione* (1653)⁷: "They had a superstitious regard for everything which savored a little of the uncommon. For example, if in their hunt they had a difficulty in killing a stag or a bear, and on opening it they found in its head or in its entrails a bone or a stone or a serpent, they said that such an object was an *oki*—that is, an enchantment which gave force and vigor (*forza e vigore*) to the animal so that it could not be killed; and they used it as the superstitious use reliquaries,⁸ in order to be always prosperous."

These passages from early observers of Indian customs and linguistic usages show us, it is true, only the application of the words *oki* and *manitou* in the concrete to persons or things characterized by unusual powers; they do not show us the use of the words as names for a single, pervasive property or force of which those persons and things are supposed to be the possessors. But after these citations had been transcribed for the present paper, there has appeared an important exposition of the Algonkin idea of *manitou*⁹ by Mr. W. Jones, based upon a special study of the Sac and Fox and Kickapoo tribes. Mr. Jones' account

⁷ In Jesuit Relations, XLIX, p. 25.

⁸ Here is the origin of the amulet and of some sorts of fetishes.

⁹ "The Algonkin Manitou," in *Amer. Jour. of Folk-Lore*, 1905, pp. 183-191.

of the meaning of *manitou* shows that it expresses precisely the same ideas as those which, upon the evidence of specialists upon the Dakotan tribes, we have seen to be expressed by *wakonda*; and since our seventeenth century testimonies show us a complete parallelism in the employment of *manitou* and the Iroquois *oki*, it is evident that the principal term in the religious vocabulary of each of these three great North American stocks corresponds to the single conception of a diffused but unequally distributed cosmic energy. *Manitou*, Mr. Jones tells us, is primarily an impersonal substantive: "in the Algonkin dialect of the Sac, Fox and Kickapoo, a rigid distinction of gender is made between things with life and things without life; . . . when they refer to *manitou* in the sense of a virtue, a property, an abstraction, they employ the form expressive of inanimate gender," though "when the property becomes identified with objects in nature, the gender becomes obscure and confused." The Algonkin "feels that the property is everywhere, is omnipresent. The belief that it is omnipresent naturally leads to the belief that it enters into everything in nature, and the notion that it is active leads the mind to look everywhere for its manifestations." "To experience a thrill is evidence enough of the existence of the substance." "There is a lively sense of its miraculous efficiency." When the Algonkin eats the heart of an especially brave enemy, slain in battle, it is for the purpose of absorbing *manitou* into himself. Particularly instructive is the explanation of the meaning of the sweat-lodge observances, given Mr. Jones by an Indian of the Fox tribe: "Often one will cut oneself over the arms and legs, . . . it is done to open up many passages for the *manitou* to pass into the body. The *manitou* comes from its place of abode in the stone. It becomes aroused by the heat of the fire, . . . proceeds out of the stone when the water is sprinkled upon it, . . . and in the steam it enters the body, . . . and imparts

some of its nature to the body. That is why one feels so well after having been in the sweat-lodge."

The great majority of the religious or magical ceremonies and observances customary amongst these Indian peoples are clearly more or less directly connected, in their minds, with the idea of *manitou*, *oki*, or *wakonda*. Totemism (as Miss Fletcher has shown), the fetish or "personal medicine," the ceremonies connected with agriculture, the taboos relating to women, the sweat-lodge ceremonies, the beliefs relating to blood and the heart: all these can be shown, not by the inferences of folk-lorists but from the language of the Indians themselves, to get their meaning from the one underlying conception concerning the nature, distribution, and special vehicles, of that impersonal vital energy by the possession of which all power and efficacy is acquired. And the list apparently does not end here. "The rules of the buffalo hunt," says Dorsey,¹⁰ "the consecration of the hearts and tongues, the ceremonies pertaining to the anointing of the sacred pole, and those connected with planting of the corn, were customs which were regarded as laws received by their ancestors from Wakanda." Dorsey here gives what we know to be an erroneous personification to *wakonda*; but what his Indian informants were trying to tell him, we may reasonably suppose, was that all these ancestral customs had always been regarded as having something to do with the *wakonda* idea.

II. MELANESIANS AND POLYNESIANS.

That the same conception is current amongst the more or less mixed races of Oceania we know from the best authorities upon the ethnology of the island peoples. "The Melanesian mind," says Codrington,¹¹ "is entirely pos-

¹⁰ *Omaha Sociology*, p. 368.

¹¹ *The Melanesians*, 1891, p. 118.

sessed by the belief in a supernatural power or influence, called almost universally *mana*. This is what works to effect everything which is beyond the ordinary power of men, outside the common processes of nature, attaches itself to persons and to things, and is manifested by results which can only be ascribed to its operation." And again:¹² "It is a power or influence not physical and in a way supernatural; but it shows itself in physical force or in any kind of power or excellence which a man possesses. This *mana* is not fixed in anything, and can be conveyed in almost everything; but spirits, whether disembodied souls or supernatural beings, have it and can impart it; and it essentially belongs to personal beings to originate it, though it may act through the medium of water or a stone or a bone. *All Melanesian religions consist in obtaining 'mana' or deriving benefit from it.*" The Polynesian *atua*, says Ratzel, has a similar meaning; and the idea "recurs in *Ani* or *Han* of Ponape, the *Kasinge* or *Kalit* of Pelew, the *Anut* of Kusaie, and the *Yaris* of Tobi," Among the Maori, we are told,¹³ "the generic name of *atua* which applied to every kind of supernatural beings and mysterious objects did not convey a distinct idea of god or a divinity, but it was simply an invisible, shadow-like existence, an impalpable breath, whose nature was mysterious, without definite attributes or well-defined powers of action. . . . Their *atua* was a mysterious something which they could not explain, a name given to all active agencies of nature whose mode of action was incomprehensible, but which were nevertheless supposed to produce real and palpable results in the social and physical economy of the world. The strangers that first came among them sending thunder and lightning by the discharge of the fire-arms were real *atuas*. A watch, whose

¹² P. 119, note.

¹³ Featherman, *Social History of the Races of Mankind*, II, p. 207.

wonderful movements they did not understand, was an *atua*," etc.

In the case of the Malagasy, a race akin to the Polynesians, the same conception is expressed by the word *andriamanitra*. "Whatever is great, whatever exceeds the capacity of their understandings, they designate by the convenient and comprehensive designation *andriamanitra*. Whatever is new and useful and extraordinary is called god."¹⁴

III. THE BANTU.

Much as has been written about the Bantu peoples, there has, I believe, until very lately been no good evidence of the prevalence amongst them of a similar idea—so readily does the nature of such an idea escape the apprehension of ethnographers and missionaries. Quite recently, however, Mr. A. Hetherwick, for many years a missionary at Blantyre, has informed us—apparently without knowing of the existence of a similar usage amongst other races—that the commonest and most familiar term in the religious vocabulary of some (at least) of the Bantu tribes is used in a sense precisely analogous to that which we have seen to belong to *wakonda*, *oki*, *manitou*, and *mana*.¹⁵ "The word *mulungu*," he writes, "is used by the Yao in a wide application. Etymologically the word is connected with the root *kulungwa*, which in so many other branches of the Bantu tongue appears as *kulu* or *kuru* and signifies 'great' or 'old.' It is the same word which appears in the Kaffir word for God, *Unkulunkulu*, which may be rendered as 'the old, old one' or 'the great, great one.' In its native use and form the word does not imply personality, for it does not belong to the personal class of nouns. Its form rather denotes a property inhering in

¹⁴ Ellis, *Hist. of Madagascar*, cited by Marett in *Folk-Lore*, 1900, p. 169.

¹⁵ In *Journal of the Anthropol. Inst. of Great Britain*, Vol. 33, p. 93.

something, as life or health inheres in the body. Among the various tribes where the word is used, missionaries have adopted it as the word for God. But the untaught Yao refuses to assign to it any idea of being or personality. It is to him more a quality or a faculty of human nature, whose significance he has extended so as to embrace the whole spirit world. [Yet] the Yao speaks of what *mulungu* has done or is doing. It is *mulungu* who [sic] made the world, man and animals. . . . *Mulungu* is regarded also as the agent in anything mysterious. 'It is *Mulungu*!' is the Yao's exclamation on being shown anything that passes the range of his understanding."

There is reason to suppose that among the mixed Hamitic-Negro stock, the Masai, a similar meaning and the same peculiar width of application belongs to the term *ngai* or *en-gai*. "Their conception of deity," says Thomson, in his *Through Masailand*,¹⁶ "seems marvelously vague. I was *ngai*. My lamp was *ngai*. . . In fact, whatever struck them as strange and incomprehensible, that they at once assumed has some connection with *ngai*." A more recent writer upon the Masai,¹⁷ it is true, declares that "the prayers for children, rain and victory are addressed to *En-gai* as a distinct personality 'who is prayed to and hears.' " But the same writer adds that, "on the other hand, the sun and moon, the morning and evening star and the mountain clouds are also invoked" (apparently under the same name), and that "in one song a certain medicine-man appears to be expressly referred to as *En-gai*." Mr. Hollis suggests, therefore, that we may "have here primitive and undeveloped religious sentiment where the personality of the deity is hardly separated from striking natural phenomena."

¹⁶ 1885, p. 445.

¹⁷ Hollis, *The Masai*, 1905, p. xix.

I have cited these testimonies with perhaps excessive fullness and in the words of the original describers of the usages in question, for the reason that the (in some cases) almost verbal identity of the accounts given by so many independent observers of three wholly distinct races, seems to me in itself a significant circumstance. By several of these observers the finer ramifications and the less obvious meanings of the idea were missed; but nearly all—whether they are describing North American, Melanesian, Polynesian or African—insist upon certain identical points, namely: that the most important and most frequently employed religio-magical term in the languages of these peoples is the name of something rather impersonal than personal; that the conception of this something wavers between that of a communicable property, that of a mobile, invisible substance and that of a latent transferable energy; that this substance, property or energy is conceived as being widely diffused amongst natural objects and human beings; that the presence of it is promptly assigned as the explanation of any unusual or exceptional power or efficacy which any object or person is found to possess; that the mind of the savage of these races is intensely interested in this force or property and greatly preoccupied with the thought of it. And in the case of the American Indians the evidence shows us still more. With them the conception is distinctly that of a pervasive energy, which tends to become especially localized in particular objects; and their languages as well as their customs show that this idea is directly involved in their beliefs concerning the special dangers and also the special magical efficacy connected with blood and with the sexual peculiarity in women. Furthermore, we have seen that, among the Indians, the same productive power that is, naturally enough, conceived to manifest itself in the vital fluid and the body of the child-bearing sex, is likewise conceived to be the source

of all fertility in nature; and that the purpose of their agricultural fertility-charms and sacrifices is expressly that of transferring this indispensable energy from beings or objects that possess it in superabundance to the growing crop. And since the Indian way—the peculiar and striking way—of using the word *manitou* or *wakonda*, as reported by more superficial observers, is precisely the same as the usage of *mana*, *atua*, *ngai*, and the rest, as reported by other superficial observers, it seems, to say the least, not improbable that the meaning and the associations of ideas which a more accurate observation shows to belong to *manitou* and *wakonda* also belong to the corresponding Melanesian, Polynesian, and Bantu words.

When, therefore, I attempt—as I shall subsequently do—to connect in detail a great variety of savage customs and beliefs with this conception, I shall at least be dealing with a *vera causa*—with an idea that is not merely inferred from the customs which it is used to explain, but can be shown to exist by independent evidence. The facts of linguistic usage here adduced already indicate the prime importance of this conception in the savage philosophy, and give us the clue to its ramifications and specialized applications in the scheme of primitive belief. On the other hand, it is not until those customs are examined and correlated, that one can understand adequately the scope and the influence of the conception, and the way in which the mind of undeveloped man works in the use of it. In a word, evidence from language and evidence from the analysis and comparison of customs and ceremonies will be found reciprocally to corroborate and illuminate one another; and taken together, I think, they suffice to make it clear that the idea of *manitou* or *mana* lies at the bottom—though in different manners and for different reasons—of many sorts of taboos; of the beliefs and observances relating to woman and her supernatural powers; of several

kinds of sacrifice; of a number of periodic ceremonies and feasts connected with agriculture among most agricultural races, and, indeed, of the greater part of all primitive agricultural rites; of moon and sun cults, or at least of certain features commonly characteristic of those cults; of the observances relating to the "sacred fire"; of some frequent features of the initiation rite; and of certain elements of the primitive eschatology. There is no "key to all the mythologies"; that is to say, the several aspects of the thought of savage man—its animism, its ghost-beliefs, etc.,—are not reducible to one another, nor necessarily traceable to a common origin. But there is one idea which is of paramount importance in the early evolution of religious and scientific thought and practice, for the reason that it generates a large part of primitive belief and custom, and widely and subtly interpenetrates the beliefs and customs which have an independent origin.

The place of this conception in the thought of savage races has, for the most part, gone unrecognized by folklorists and writers on primitive religion. It is hardly too much to say that most of the systematic treatises on these subjects essentially misrepresent primitive belief, and explain wrongly most of the customs of which they treat, through their neglect of the *manitou*-idea. Even so recent and so admirably learned a work as Mr. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* takes no sufficient account of that idea, while it very much overworks the notion of sympathetic magic. To Mr. Frazer the term *wakonda* is simply synonymous with *tabu*; of its real meaning, and of its real synonyms in the other Indian languages and those of the Polynesians, Melanesians and Bantu, he apparently knows nothing.* Similarly Mr. Ernest Crawley's recent study of primitive marriage, *The Mystic Rose*, 1902, which deals chiefly with sexual taboos, misses (I cannot but think) the true expla-

* *Golden Bough*, 2d. ed., I, p. 343.

nation of most of those taboos altogether, through a failure to connect them with the same idea. But it ought to be observed that several writers have already noticed this feature of savage thought, and that the disposition to recognize its nature and importance is steadily growing. Dr. Brinton, for example, knew the Indian languages and customs far too well to miss this point altogether. "*Wakonda*," he wrote in his last work,¹⁸ "was not a deity, but expressed the deific power believed to be present in men, animals and things." And more generally, he notices the occurrence in early thought of the idea that "all gods and holy objects were merely vehicles through which life and power poured into the world from the inexhaustible and impersonal source of both."¹⁹ Yet in the same volume we find the inconsistent declaration already noted, that the "psychic origin of all religious thought" is the "belief that behind the phenomenal world lies the ultimate power of mind, of conscious will, of intelligence analogous in some way to our own." "To the undeveloped reason the Other is ever conceived as Another, a Self, and is clothed with the attributes of the thinking Ego." Dr. Brinton thus failed to make serious use of the truth of which he had caught a glimpse—which is the more unfortunate because his book is in many respects well fitted to be what it has actually become, the best-known popular manual of the subject.

A little later Mr. R. R. Marett called attention to the peculiar use of the terms *mana*, *wakonda*, *ngai*, *andriamanitra*, and made that usage the basis of his theory of a "pre-animistic religion."²⁰ Mr. Marett does not, however, seem to me to do full justice to all sides of the belief which was "logically and chronologically prior to Anim-

¹⁸ *Religions of Primitive Peoples*, 1897, p. 60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

²⁰ In *Folk-Lore*, 1900, p. 180.

ism, constituting as the latter does but a particular embodiment of the former." For he finds the essence of that belief to lie in the apprehension "of the supernatural or supernormal, as distinguished from the natural and normal." It arose when "the emotions of awe, wonder, and the like. . . outstripped the power of 'natural,' that is, of reasonable explanation." "Of all English words Awe is, I think, the one that expresses the fundamental religious feeling most nearly. . . *Primus in orbe timor fecit deos* is true only if we admit wonder, admiration, interest, respect, even love perhaps, to be, no less than fear, essential constituents of these elemental moods." Mr. Marett accordingly proposes to name this primordial religious attitude "Supernaturalism," or preferably, "Teratism." Now such a theory is naturally enough suggested by the peculiarity of the use of the terms in question which most commonly strikes the missionary and the traveler; namely, the savage's fashion of promptly applying those terms to anything novel, surprising, incomprehensible or alarming. But I think a careful consideration of the passages cited earlier in this paper will make it evident that *wakonda* or *manitou* or *mana* are not primarily names for the "supernormal" or the astonishing—and certainly not for that which evokes awe, respect and love—but rather for the efficacious, the powerful, the productive. What the "elemental mood" was we really do not know; what we do know is that the *wakonda* or *mana* that the actual savage is so supremely concerned about is essentially a sort of diffused substance or energy upon the possession of which all exceptional power or ability or fecundity depends. This energy is, to be sure, terrible (under certain circumstances) and it is mysterious and incomprehensible; but it is so because it is vastly powerful, not because the things that manifest it are unusual or "supernatural" or such as "defeat reasonable expectation." In other words, Mr. Ma-

rett appears to me to put the emphasis on the wrong side, and consequently to underestimate the importance of this idea in engendering all sorts of magical observances of a fecundative or prophylactic sort. The pre-animistic belief—the belief which is, at all events, independent of animism—is not best described as “supernaturalism” or “teratism,” for the fundamental notion in it is not that of the unpredictable, abnormal and portentous, but that of a force which is conceived as working according to quite regular and intelligible laws—a force which can be studied and controlled. A better name, then, for this group of beliefs would be “Primitive Energetics.” In spite of these criticisms, however, Mr. Maret’s paper is notable as being probably the earliest to insist clearly and unequivocally upon the primacy in early thought of a non-animistic conception expressed by such terms as *wakonda* and its synonyms.

Still more recently MM. Hubert and Mauss, writing in *L’année sociologique* for 1902-3, seem to have substantially anticipated the main conclusions of the present paper. Their *Mémoire*²¹ I have been unable to see; but upon essentials it apparently agrees pretty closely with the theory here presented. Finally Prof. D. N. Söderblom, in his little manual *Die Religionen der Erde*²² has set forth briefly and inadequately, but quite clearly, some aspects of what he calls the conception of *Lebenselektrizität* in savage belief.

In concluding, it is worth while to urge upon ethnologists and students of early religion the adoption of a rec-

²¹ It is known to me only from Mr. Hartland’s notice in *Folk-Lore*, 1903; and has come to my attention after the greater part of this paper was completed. It is perhaps proper to mention that the conclusions here set forth were reached in 1900, independently of any of the writers mentioned, though they were much influenced by the writer’s studies under the late Léon Marillier—whose unrivalled stores of accurate learning concerning savage thought and custom were lost to science through his untimely death, before he had published any work commensurate with his knowledge and his powers.

²² 1905, p. 8-9.

ognized and unambiguous name for the sort of primitive conception that has here been set forth and that promises soon to receive the general attention that it deserves. I have already intimated that, if one must have a word of Greek or Latin origin, "Primitive Energetics" appears to be a better name than either of those suggested by Mr. Marett. But the use, in naming features of savage belief, of stems already found in other English words, and having already established connotations, has proven to be a disadvantageous practice. Terms so constructed are almost certain to be both equivocal and misleading. Tylor's invention of the term "animism," for example, has introduced a singular amount of confusion into ethnology. A good deal of Mr. Spencer's labored and unprofitable reasoning concerning the origin of religion is, for example, almost wholly due to the more or less misleading connection between the words "animism" and "animate." It is better, where possible, to adopt as the designation of a widespread primitive concept or custom one of the native names for it. Of the concept here under discussion the North American Indian names are perhaps the most familiar, and their full scope and meaning has been most clearly and authoritatively set forth. *Wakonda* and *oki*, however, are vocables that cannot very expressively or euphoniously be anglicized. The Algokin *manitou* is less open to this objection; and it is, in any case, the most generally familiar of all the Indian terms of this class. I venture, therefore, to propose that those who treat of such matters should agree—until a better name be found—to refer to the primitive belief in a pervasive, life-giving, impersonal energy as *manitouism*, and to that energy itself as *manitou*.

ARTHUR O. LOVEJOY.

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, ST. LOUIS, MO.