

THE SUBJECTIVE AND THE OBJECTIVE

A LESSON FROM THE CAVE OF PLATO-REPUBLIC, BOOK VII

After this, I said, imagine the enlightenment and ignorance of our nature in a figure: Behold! human beings living in a sort of underground den, which has a mouth opening towards the light, and reaching all across the den; they have been here from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them; for the chains are arranged in such a manner as to prevent them from turning their heads. At a distance above and behind them the light of a fire is blazing, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way, like the screen which marionette players have before them, over which they show the puppets.

I see, he said.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall, carrying vessels which appear over the wall; and some of the passengers, as you would expect, are talking, and some of them are silent?

That is a strange image, he said, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said, how could they see anything but the shadows, if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which were being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?

Yes, he said.

And if they were able to talk with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy that the voice which they heard was the voice of a passing shade?

No question, he said.

There can be no question that the truth would be to them just nothing but the shadows of the images.

THE SUBJECTIVE AND THE OBJECTIVE

A LESSON FROM THE CAVE OF PLATO-REPUBLIC, BOOK VII

THE term *consciousness* is used by writers connected with the Theosophical movement with a very wide range of meaning. Atoms are invisible lives, says H.P.B.; and there is no such thing as inorganic, in the sense of dead or lifeless matter. Every variety or kind of existence is conscious on its own plane or according to its own condition or state; the molecules of granite as well and as truly, though not in the same way, as the mind of man. Every molecule in the brain has its own consciousness, according to its state or plane of existence; and the sum of the consciousness of its molecules is the consciousness of the brain in its totality, considered as a merely physical, visible organ.

But the astral man, which we may take to be coextensive with the physical man, and to correspond with it, if not to coincide with it, organ for organ and molecule for molecule, is the real seat of sensation; and in the brain the sensations are registered and interpreted. The astral brain, the organ of Kama Manas, or of the lower or personal mind, furnishes the connecting link between the thinker and the object of thought; and here is bridged the chasm which has been recognized by philosophers in Western lands at least, as utterly impassable. Says President Bascom:

Facts must exist either in space as physical or in consciousness, as mental; there is no third state. Mental and physical phenomena are cut broadly and deeply apart, by the fact that the one class transpires exclusively in consciousness and the other as exclusively out of consciousness (in space).

Again he says:

There is no *a priori* impossibility discoverable by us, making the transfer of influence from mind to matter, from matter to mind, an absurdity. Our last traces of physical force in the movement inward are found in the brain; our first traces in the movement outward are also met with at the same point. Thus far only can the eye trace material changes; here is it first able to pick them up. How the last nervous impulse is linked to the play of consciousness...we cannot imagine...We are profoundly ignorant of any connection between the two.

Now the scheme of Theosophy recognizes a continuous gradation of powers, faculties, states, principles-call them what you will-from the highest or most spiritual to the lowest or most material. In this whole gamut of states or conditions no chasm is found; there is nothing to bridge; consciousness is the necessary substratum and presupposition of the most material, and consciousness is the noumenon or essential reality of the most spiritual.

THE SUBJECTIVE AND THE OBJECTIVE A LESSON FROM THE CAVE OF PLATO-REPUBLIC, BOOK VII

We know of nothing more material or external than the physical, material, visible body-the world of matter, so called; and here is the inner wall (reversing the figure from outward to inward) of the cave which Socrates describes in Plato's dialogue; the wall upon which fall the shadows supposed by the prisoners to be the only realities. Indeed, the "wall" may be taken as merely the drop-curtain of the theatre, and the shadows themselves as representing the physical substance known to ourselves and our fellow prisoners. Hence there can be on this lowest plane (the plane of the shadows) really no consciousness as we know it; consciousness only looks on what is below, and cannot for its chains turn its face upward to the light. It is said, indeed, that the atom is the Atma or seventh principle of the molecule; but the molecule is infinitesimal and invisible, and what consciousness on that plane-we cannot profitably guess even, much less know.

The astral or kamic man is within, or above, or superior to the physical man; and its apprehension of external or physical nature, which we term sensation, is the lowest form of consciousness recognized by us. But mere sensation is not intelligent. As the astral or emotional man exists within (in the symbolic meaning of "within") the physical man, and by its power of sense takes hold of the latter, so there exists within the astral or emotional the logical faculty or principle whose office is to sort out the sensations and refer each to its source or cause in the outer world. This logical faculty (the lower mind or Kama Manas) is, as related to the world or planes below it, the faculty that perceives; and its action in taking hold of and interpreting the sensation is called perception.

Now suppose we consider the real Ego, the enduring entity that we mean when we say "man," to be one of the prisoners represented by Plato as confined in a den or cave; and external, physical, visible and tangible matter as the shadows on the wall of the cave. The Ego, in its descent from spirit into matter, goes deeper and deeper into the cave until it reaches the wall and is stopped. It can go no farther; and it must, impelled by the universal and all-embracing law of action and reaction, retrace its course toward spirit. Its progress downward or outward (from spirit, -inward as to the cave) has been without consciousness in any sense that we can comprehend. When it strikes the wall of its dungeon and strives to go still farther, it cannot do so; its limit is reached. It develops unintelligent consciousness-a consciousness wholly spiritual, and in no sense manasic. As it recedes backward in involution, still facing the wall, the reflected light of Manas thrown back from the wall enables it to interpret in a manner these sensations-to distinguish them from each other and to group them-but not at first to relate them to itself. Here is the beginning of the lowest mind, known in Mr. Sinnett's classification as Kama Rupa or the Animal soul. To reach this degree of development immeasurable ages were required. The first dawn of sensation begins when the physical development has proceeded far enough to furnish a suitable vehicle for the astral body. The astral development goes on, and moulds the physical world to its purpose, until it in its turn has become-or until the two together have become-a suitable vehicle for the emotional and perceptive faculties. These steps are easy to name, but they have been taken with slow and toilsome tread through the first, second and third rounds of our chain of globes; and were repeated in briefer but immensely long periods in the first races of this our fourth round.

THE SUBJECTIVE AND THE OBJECTIVE

A LESSON FROM THE CAVE OF PLATO-REPUBLIC, BOOK VII

To the stone belongs molecular consciousness, not consciousness, as we know it, but only so called by analogy; to the plant belongs astral consciousness, or the dawn of sensation; to the animal belongs emotional consciousness, or the dawn of perception. As this faculty or principle becomes more and more fully developed and active a new faculty begins to act-the human intellect, the lower manas begins to awake and exercise its functions. The prisoner has retreated far enough from the wall of his cave, has evolved far enough toward spiritual perception, to be able to recognize his lower principles as himself-to relate the experience, the sensations, the perceptions of these lower principles to his own identity; to distinguish between the "I" and the "not-I." This is self-consciousness, or consciousness of self; and here the human stage is reached in the return of the monad from its journey to the confines of matter.

In *Discussions of Philosophy and Literature*, Sir William Hamilton, one of the foremost philosophers of modern times, makes the following statement:

In the philosophy of mind, *subjective* denotes what is to be referred to the thinking subject, the Ego; *objective*, what belongs to the object of thought, the Non-Ego...These correlative terms correspond to the first and most important distinction in philosophy; they embody the original antithesis in consciousness of self and non-self-a distinction which in fact involves the whole science of mind; for psychology is nothing more than a determination of the subjective and the objective in themselves, and in their reciprocal relations.

Hamilton was not only a profound thinker and an erudite scholar; he was also a master in the English language, and capable of expressing his thoughts clearly and tersely. The definition above quoted certainly gives the right use of these terms; and for those who, with President Bascom, hold that a gulf that cannot be bridged cuts broadly apart the facts which transpire in consciousness and the facts which transpire in space, it would seem to need no further elucidation. But when they are used in Theosophical discussing, the further consideration must not be overlooked, that the Ego, the Non-Ego, and the bond between the two (the thinker, the object of thought, and the thought) are all one. This gives emphasis to the fact that the line between the subject and object is purely imaginary; the distinction is logical and not metaphysical. Thus the terms subjective and objective are seen to be wholly correlative, and what is subjective in one relation is objective in another, and *vice versa*. This correlative feature has always been recognized; but it becomes more significant and takes on new phases when viewed in the light of the septenary constitution of man.

THE SUBJECTIVE AND THE OBJECTIVE

A LESSON FROM THE CAVE OF PLATO-REPUBLIC, BOOK VII

Philosophers who have thought most deeply, and who have explored most fully the nature of man, and the various problems of ontology, show by their postulates and their reasoning that they implicitly apprehend, if they do not explicitly recognized, several of the distinctions represented by the septenary classification of principles. Dr. James March, president of the University of Vermont at the time of his death about fifty years ago, left several philosophical treatises which were afterward collected and published by his successor in the faculty of that institution. It is many years since I read this work, but I remember distinctly an essay in which the learned doctor discussed the changes wrought by the supervening of higher faculties in the course of evolution. He spoke of the force by which a crystal is built up by accretion, by regular additions from without; of the force by which a vegetable germ develops from within; of the powers of perception and locomotion which distinguish the animal, to some species of he conceded the logical faculty of ratiocination; and of the faculty of intuition, or perception of intellectual and spiritual truths and axioms, which distinguishes man from the lower forms of animal life. Here, in the classification of existence as amorphous, crystalline, vegetable, animal and human, each higher including all lower but superadding a new faculty, power, or principle or growth, there is plainly foreshadowed the method upon which our teaching of the septenary constitution of nature and of man is developed.

As the subjective is that which is within, and the objective is that which is without, the relation first emerges upon the evolution of the astral principle, or Linga Sharira; for the merely physical entity is so thoroughly one in nature that its different forms can hardly be considered as bearing this relation to each other. (Yet there is probably a septenary in physical nature below the astral, as witness earth, water, air, fire, etc.; and earth may be in truth objective to air.) The distinctions that are so obvious, organic, inorganic, etc., are really differing manifestations of the informing higher principles. But upon the development of the astral principle the relation appears; this is subjective as to the physical body, and the latter is objective as to the former. So when the kamic principle develops, or evolves from potentiality to potency, from a latent state to activity, this in turn becomes subjective, and to it the lower principles are objective. When the Lower Manas in its turn becomes active and subjective, it take intelligent cognizance of the lower principles as objective, and recognizes their identity with itself, and then self-consciousness appears. And when, by evolution or training, the Higher Manas becomes active, then will the entire quaternary, or lower Ego, become in relation to this added faculty, objective.

This is very well expressed in an article in *Lucifer* for September 1891 (Vol IX, p. 23,) as follows:

This expansion of consciousness includes a development of the subtile senses which open up to the inner man new worlds, people with their inhabitants, and interdependent the one with the other. The subjective becomes the objective, with a still more subtile subjectivity beyond, which can become again objective as a still more spiritual consciousness is attained by the striver after freedom.

In the *Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I, p. 189, H.P.B. says:

THE SUBJECTIVE AND THE OBJECTIVE
A LESSON FROM THE CAVE OF PLATO-REPUBLIC, BOOK VII

It stands to reason that there must be an enormous difference in such terms as "objectivity" and "subjectivity," "materiality" and "spirituality," when the same terms are applied to different planes of being and perception.

This paper is intended to be suggestive rather than exhaustive; and I shall have accomplished my purpose if I have set the relation of subjective to objective in a clearer light, and pointed out the direction in which to look for a better understanding of the philosophical side of our literature.

ALPHA

Path, February 1896