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## The Consciousness of Higher Animals \*

By Hermann Poppelbaum

THE bodily form of the higher animals is best understood by treating the human form as origin and centre, of which the animal is a one-sided or stunted modification. Once this is recognised from a study of Goethe's and Rudolf Steiner's works, the thought lies near at hand to - attempt a similar treatment of the: realm of comparative psychology of man and animals. We should then start from the human soul as the centre and archetype, and represent the peculiarities of the animal soul as a falling-away or aberration from this centre in various directions. As a starting-point for such research we may turn to the book where Rudolf Steiner gives an all-embracing and unprejudiced description of the processes of the inner life of man, that is, the, *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*. Strange as it may sound, this book also becomes the foundation-stone for a spiritual-scientific psychology of animals.

Let us attempt an outline sketch along these lines. Consider man to begin with from the aspect of cognition. A chaos of percepts, void of inner connections, would be given to his consciousness if he were not able to introduce order and division by his *thinking* activity. Rudolf Steiner describes the character of man's thought in deliberate contrast to the customary theory of knowledge. Human thought does not create an arbitrary order and impose it on the things of the world. It is rather an organ which reaches into the invisible inner structure of the world itself, and, by deriving thence the concepts, reconstitutes-from the unrelated and chaotic detail of pure sense-given perceptions-the original totality. The latter in itself is full of inner relationships and connections. Thought only adds to the world of percepts what has already been left out of it. It adds nothing foreign to the percept, but on the contrary, the indispensable complement. It is above all peculiar to man to bring this cleft into the world of Reality. It has nothing to do with the nature of things themselves. In the *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* Rudolf Steiner gives frequent hints to show how this specifically human dismemberment of Reality is connected with the structure and organisation of man himself (see, for example, page 82 of the 1921 edition). And it lies near at hand to connect this tearing-asunder of the two halves of Reality with the division which has taken place in the human body as between the head-pole and the pole of metabolism and the limbs. The head as center of the nerves-and-senses-system becomes the mediator of perceptions, yet inasmuch as it is the bearer of the senses it also conceals from us the "other half" of Reality. The uprightness of the human figure—the raising of the head above the horizontal posture of the animal—is also a bodily expression of the severance the human Ego makes between itself and the World, a severance it overcomes once more in the process of knowledge. When the human Ego unites concept and percept in Thought, it bridges over the gulf which has been opened wide by the very organisation of man's body.

\* By kind permission. from the *Goetheanum Weekly*, Vol. 7, No. 24.

Yet man also stands in another relation to the World's totality—namely by his life of action. Action, as Rudolf Steiner showed in the second part of the *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* only attains the truly human stage when by the direct apprehension of a "moral intuition" it becomes an ethically creative act in the true sense, of the word-achieved independently of bodily needs and without reference I to any antecedents. In action, therefore, the Ego frees itself from the organic process. Behind this truth there is a patent fact—emphasized again and again by Rudolf Steiner, yet far too little recognized by psychology: The conscious Ego has no part what ever in the bodily functions which are necessary to carry out any resolve. Only the picture of the deed stands before the conscious Ego. The impulse to realise it is the last thing we still experience with full intensity; what then takes place eludes our everyday consciousness. The setting-in- motion of the limbs which execute our will is hid from us by the dark night which wraps our consciousness at this point.

Yet in this very fact we recognize a preliminary condition for the realisation of human freedom. For if man took part consciously in setting his limbs in motion, he would always be in danger of some organic process or f natural need or forgotten experience I stealing its way into his resolution and jeopardising the independence of the moral concept. Once more, it lies at hand for us to recognize in the uprightness of the human figure the bodily expression of this peculiarity of human I action (I mean, of course, our truly human, not our instinctive actions). The uprightness of the human form (unlike the animal in this respect) resigns the sustaining members *entirely* to earthly gravity, and as Rudolf Steiner told us, gravity blots out the conscious life.

The head of man splits the Reality into two and thereby summons him to conscious knowledge. His limbs are incorporated in the earthly field of gravity and thereby prepare the way for his free action.

Once these connections are rightly grasped, they open out the way for an insight into the soul-world of the higher animals. From the picture, here unfolded, of human cognition and human action we only have to expunge what is due to the conscious activity of the Ego. The remainder will then presumably hold good of the animal.

Let us first observe how the human Ego is active in its cognition of the outer world. In apprehending concepts and incorporating them into the world of percepts, the ego evolves definite *things* out of an "absolutely flat surface-in-thought," as Rudolf Steiner calls it in his *Foundations of a Theory .of Knowledge for Goethe's Conception of the World*. \* Thus from the woven tapestry of sense-perceptions we get the world of space, filled for our consciousness with sensible things

EDITORIAL NOTE.—This book, unfortunately not yet available in English, is one of Rudolf Steiner's earliest works—published in 1886. (Compare *The Story of My Life*, page 81-82) In the passage here cited Dr. Steiner speaks of the world of pure sense-experience: What does it contain, as it passes before our consciousness without our having worked upon it with our thought? It is a pure side by-sideness in space and sequence in time..an aggregate of details void of all inner connections . . . a manifold of utterly indifferent, equivalent objects. . . For pure experience, the less highly organised snail is equivalent to the most highly evolved animal. For the different degrees of organic perfection only appear to us when we take hold of the given manifold and work it out in thought and concept. . The world at this stage is an absolutely flat surface-in-thought. No one portion of it stands out above another, no one portion shows any difference-in-thought I from another. Only when the spark of thought strikes down into the flat surface do heights and depths begin to emerge. Only then will one thing stand out more or less far above another; it all begins to take on definite form, and threads are woven from one detail to another till it becomes a complete and self-contained harmony. "

Compare the opening chapters of the *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*.

and entities. It is as though one were to take a rather confusing mosaic and by some plastic treatment bring out certain portions in relief, distinguishing them from the flat background. "Only when the spark of thought strikes down into the flat surface do heights and depths begin to emerge," says Rudolf Steiner. Through this activity, proceeding from the conscious Ego, man gives back to the surrounding world the reality and objectivity which it has lost in the mere percept. So there arises the consciousness of "things," that is, "Objective Consciousness." Now we may ask the question: Do the higher animals also thus succeed in separating "objects" out of the field of their perception? (We have seen in the preceding essay that the lower animals are aware of the world in an altogether different way.) Many an observation of every-day life would seem to indicate that the warm blooded animals are able to identify "things." The dog "recognises its master." The crow flies away from the huntsman's gun, while it is unafraid of a walking-stick.

Very careful observation is necessary here. Consider the way a horse perceives. It trots along quite steadily till a small object lying at the roadside makes it shy. This, we can easily see, is due to the fact that the object as such is *not* clearly grasped; only the sudden, unexpected sense-impression irritates the animal. Precisely owing to a faulty objectification, the impression sinks down deeply and intensely, or as we rightly say, "shoots into marrow and bone," and the horse springs sideways. How cool and deliberate by contrast is the way a man surveys the field of vision and "envisages" the details. Still more evident is the lack of objectification in the bull which charges blindly at anything red, obviously without concern for its significance as an outlined object; only excited into the very depths of its body by the flaring colour which "leaps into the mind." Truly, we here find a similarity to the way the World appears to man before the emergence of thought, namely, as a chaos of disconnected impressions.

This lack of a clear grasp of *things* also emerges from some of the famous experiments of Wolfgang Kohler, one of the greatest of modern psychologists. The anthropoid apes on which he experimented have become famous! Without any kind of training they fell to using sticks to get at otherwise unattainable objects-generally bananas. This looks like action out of insight, and yet, Kohler observed a very strange phenomenon. Almost without exception, his animals would only use the "tool" if it "stood out" in a purely optical sense, very clearly in the field of vision. Otherwise they would take no notice of it. As Kohler aptly says, the animal is unable to "see the object apart" from an unfavorable background. Instead, it will roam around looking for something suitable to lay its hands on, and eventually make a vain effort to draw the heavy bar out of the bolt of the door. Although the latter is "for practical purposes more firmly fixed than are the branches on the tree, " yet" in a purely optical sense it stands out obviously from the wooden door." Kohler formulates the point with brilliant insight: "There is evidently a kind of optical fixedness, which makes it just as difficult in theory to separate the object, as the strongest nails would make it difficult to tear it loose in practice. \*

We are vividly reminded of the flat surface in the field of thought, " of which Rudolf Steiner speaks when characterizing our consciousness before the spark of thought strikes in. From this strange dependence of their perception of "things" on optical conditions, we see that the anthropoid apes do not possess a genuine objective consciousness.

To find an access to this condition from the point of view of human experience, we may remember the half-awake dreamy condition which sometimes overcomes us when we are very tired. At such times we often feel ourselves more strongly influenced by single sense-impressions-isolated smells or sounds. We are more easily startled \* Wolfgang Kohler: *Intelligence Tests on Anthropoid Apes (Intelligenzprüfungen an Anthropoiden)*, page 85.

by sudden impressions on the other hand we fail to "grasp" what is happening. Only when we "pull ourselves together" with a perceptible inner jerk, I then again we are aware of "things," and, as it were, focus the parts of the surrounding world and put them at the proper mental distance to observe them. So we distinctly perceive how man in his "objective consciousness" literally wards things off-or, as they say in German, holds them "away from the body."

Such is the difference between man and animal for our perception and awareness of the world. The question now arises: where in the animal is that other half of Reality which belongs to the mere world of percepts as a hidden but essential complement, which man takes hold of in his concepts?

Here we must study how the animal belongs to a given habitat or scene of life. It can find its way about thoroughly well in all the situations which will occur in its natural habitat. The animal is only at home when surrounded by the things which are important in its natural life. It has no organ to perceive anything else. It is like a human being who is indifferent to anything beyond his limited sphere of interests. So too the animal is only "familiar" with the situations that are characteristic and significant for its species. Other conditions, which for an observant man would be just as much a part of the whole scene, are practically non-existent for the animal.

We can interpret the matter in this way. The animal inherently possesses only those concepts which apply to the limited world of its species. Even these it does not *conceive*; they are incorporated in the whole structure of its organism. They are, as it were, forgotten, they cannot be lifted into consciousness. They are latent, waiting to be called forth by the appearance of the corresponding percept. Then, as it were, they "react," and the creature is impelled to action—not automatically, but as the result of a fusion of concept and percept which remains in the unconscious. (Man can very well imagine this state of mind—he himself has it whenever he acts out of habits of thought. Then he can actually feel the inborn concept "reacting" in his inner life. Let him by no means say that he cannot "put himself in the animal's place." He who observes himself truly will do so more often than his vanity would like.)

Man alone has the possibility to step out of the limited circle of his inherited or acquired concepts and to grasp new ones, relating them freely to his percepts. He alone is able to add ever new constituents of the Universe to those he has already grasped and understood. His interest, literally, his being-among-the-things, *inter-esse*, is in the Universe as such. *The significance of things for the animal is biological or none at all; for man their import is objective and world-wide.*

This also throws light on animal action. It differs essentially from human action. That which arises in the animal by a fixed relation of percept and unconceived concept is realised scarcely less fixedly in corporeal action. In other words, the animal lacks the duality of cognition and action. To speak in paradoxes: perceptive experience, not altogether faced in consciousness, slides of its own accord into action, not actively undertaken. Man alone first knows or recognises and then prepares to act. His Ego holds watch at the bridgehead leading from experience to action. In the animal there is no watchman at the bridge. The animal cannot prepare to act, nor can it leave the act undone. It has no part in inner freedom.

Observe the bodily nature of the higher animals, and the significance their posture emerges like a script. The horizontal position answers to a life of nerves-and-senses not fully separated from the metabolic process. The monkey's failure to attain the fully upright posture is the bodily expression of its non-attainment of objective consciousness. The trunk does not yet carry the head; the latter is still "hanging by the spine," as Goethe puts it. The limbs are not yet separated into hands associated with the upper body and legs as carrying supports placed in the vertical line. That is the signature of man. They remain in an uncertain and intermediate stage. As the limbs of the quadruped have grown into the mutually similar fore-and hindlegs, so does the ape possess four hand-like feet. The mammal skeleton always expresses a non-fulfilled severance of the above and the below. This incomplete polarity has its psychological aspect in the absence of true freedom in the creature to which the form belongs.

The sense-organs—as we can see from the above—fulfill a very different part in man and in the higher animals. For man, they mediate the world in such a way that he is challenged to the act of conscious knowledge-challenged to overcome the meaninglessness of the mere percept. Hence they are far more separated from the life of the body as a whole. To a far greater extent than in the other warm-blooded creatures, they are part and parcel of the outer world. Take the eye of the bird, for instance. As Rudolf Steiner often emphasised, the blood flows into it more vigorously, forming a fan- or comb-like continuation saturated with living blood and penetrating into the vitreous humour. This is a visible expression of the fact that the animal has not yet withdrawn its conscious experience from the sense-organs. It still has a dreamlike feeling of the sense-process as such, instead of devoting itself without reserve, as man does, to the outer world.

The human eye, says Rudolf Steiner, so-to-speak sacrifices itself by becoming utterly transparent; claims nothing for itself, and thereby makes it possible for Man to see the World. A similar self-sacrifice must be ascribed to the nerves and certain other processes of the brain. The life-process in them must withdraw to some extent, for every act of our cognition. Hence it is said in the *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*) page 148: "The psycho-physical organisation of man. . . suspends its own activity, it yields ground. And the ground thus set free is occupied by thought." So does the upper pole of the human body give itself up in order to make free the Ego's access to the World.

Whenever the organs in the sense and thought-organisation press forward into conscious life, the Ego is pushed out of its direct and free communication with the world. Headache arises, hindering thought and perception, or making them quite impossible if the attack is severe. Then we have morbidly present in men what is a healthy and normal condition for the higher animals: the being consciously partakes in the inner processes of the upper organism. In the normal animal the blood is constantly hammering and beating into the sense organs. So is the animal "caught" in the inner experience, does not get free—nay it is almost stunned by it. In man, the tendency to headache is overcome whenever he cognises the world.

So too on the side of action, we can recognise a deeper significance in the aforesaid extinction of the limb processes from consciousness. If we had dreamlike awareness of the activity of our limbs, as the animals must have, we should experience a certain pleasure. In the baby as it kicks about this pleasure is quite justified, nor need it be altogether denied to the grown-up! But when we resolve upon an action the prospect of pleasure by sheer limb-activity must play no part whatever. A truly human action must come about without any reference to this. We may therefore also say that human action is the overcoming of organic pleasure. To be dependent on such pleasure would be morbid.

Human perception and thought arise by an overcoming of pain in the head human action by an overcoming of pleasure in the limbs. Yet pleasure and pain are not lost to man, for in the same measure as he lifts them out of the bodily organs they become organs of the soul. The Ego learns to use them in true freedom.

*The raising of human consciousness above the beast is ever a process of healing. The Ego heals the human being from the sickness of becoming animal.*