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We may never know the epistemological systems of other creatures inhabiting the planet or universe, or whether they exist at all. It seems as though our fellow earth-bound beings merely accept the reality around them without question. A dog more than likely merely sees or smells food and finds shelter when needed. An elephant migrates toward water when water in its current location becomes unavailable. It is unclear, though seems unlikely, that the dog or elephant categorizes or orders the items in its reality into any type of structure. However as human beings, we have an undeniable and inexplicable need to explain and order the universe around us. This urge appears to be yet another uniquely human characteristic and there are those who might suggest it to be the Original Sin; though we may never know if this is truly a unique trait, unless we learn to speak dog or elephant. Regardless, human beings have developed a wide variety of systems and structures to order and explain reality. We have categorized the items and creatures around us into groups and ordered them into hierarchies. This has been done in cultural and religious systems since before recorded history and also more recently under the guise of science. Though the reasons for creating these structures and classifications are somewhat mysterious, it is clear that it is we who have created them due to their existence, variety and abundance in nearly all distinct human groups and cultures.

The foundations of human knowledge rest on pillars of distinction. Human beings classify everything around them. Distinct objects abound in our reality – a tree over here, a dog over there; or *un arbol aqui y un perro alla* if you prefer to categorize them with names from another language. Likewise, these distinctions can be subdivided – a tree contains a trunk, branches and leaves; a dog has paws, fur and teeth. These subdivisions can be further subdivided *ad infinitum* to the cellular level and beyond. They can also be placed into larger categories. The tree is a plant, the dog a mammal, and they can be placed in categories pertaining to their genetic structure and how they may be related based on certain behaviors or innate characteristics. This may seem scientific, but it has been occurring since prehistoric times. All cultures and human groups organize reality in one way or another. A snake may be revered in Hindu culture, while shunned in Judeo-Christian culture. However, problems seem to arise when certain objects or organisms do not fit comfortably into one category or another. When such a thing is discovered to be unclassifiable it will inevitably be considered special, dangerous or both.

In her book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Mary Douglas addresses these anomalous objects and what they mean for human culture as a whole. She classifies the anomalies as dirt, or polluting objects. These anomalies are things that may be revered or feared or may be both. There are a wide variety of anomalies, and the anomalies vary depending on how the reality of a particular culture is ordered and defined.

Dirt is one such anomaly. Dirt is a form of chaos in a clean organized reality, creating disorder. Thus it is important for Jews and Muslims to wash before meals to

restore order. Likewise it is important for Hindus to do the same. However, in Hindu culture it may also be appropriate for a member of a lower caste to ritually dirty oneself to show respect to a member of a higher caste thus expressing subordination. This ritual pollution of oneself for subordination purposes does not appear to occur in Judeo-Muslim culture (8-9). This is due to the different structure of Hindu reality as compared with that of Judeo-Muslim reality in that traditional Hindu reality contains a more rigidly hierarchical social structure.

Food and animals can also be anomalies in certain structures. The book of Leviticus in the Bible lists a plethora of rules that Jews must follow. One such rule requires that Jews refrain from eating unclean animals such as the pig. In Douglas' view, this is due to the fact that the pig is a hoofed animal, yet does not chew cud like other hoofed animals and is therefore an anomaly, unable to be put in any category of animal with any certainty. As pastoralists, a cloven-hoofed cud-chewing animal, such as the sheep or cow, was considered proper food for the Israelites. Thus an animal that does not fit into their structural ideal of food is considered anomalous and dangerous. The camel is also a non-cud chewing hoofed animal and therefore cannot be eaten. Meanwhile the hare and the hyrax chew cud but are not hoofed so they cannot be eaten either (54-55).

Some anomalous animals may also be revered, such as the scaly anteater or *pangolin* of Africa. The *Lele* culture reveres this animal because it is special and anomalous. It has scales like a fish but climbs trees; it also lays eggs but suckles its young. Thus the animal does not fit comfortably into any category. It is therefore revered and at the same time feared by the *Lele* for its special powers. Only a few members of

the community may hunt and eat this animal because it is dangerous for the others.

For those who are initiated however, it gives them special powers (168-173). Thus there are structures within the community defining who is special enough to hunt and eat the *pangolin* and who is not.

Douglas lists and theorizes about a number of anomalies throughout the breadth of human culture and reality. Her theory, known as Structuralism, is that we as human beings order the universe into discreet categories and that if something does not fit into a category it becomes a polluting or taboo thing within a culture. This theory seems reasonable as examples abound among many cultures throughout history and into the present day. A modern example would be the exclusion of homosexuals from certain rights such as marriage. Because they cannot be considered a “normal” heterosexual couple they do not fit into a proper category and therefore will be considered dangerous, special or both depending on the way reality is ordered in a particular culture.

Structuralism is a theory that is applicable in certain cultural contexts, yet it does not explain all behaviors. Anomalies abound in reality, as each and every thing if separated is unique. If for example, the Israelites had defined their structures slightly differently; perhaps the sheep would be the anomalous animal because it has wool and the camel, cow and pig do not. If this were the case perhaps lamb would be the unclean food. Anomalies are also in the eye of the beholder. For example, a dog breeder or scientist might consider a poodle a dog due to various genetic reasons, but perhaps an Inuit believing a dog would be an animal for sled pulling might not. It is conceivable that the Inuit might consider the poodle to be a different animal entirely as its function for human use is entirely unrelated to that of the husky, not to mention the fact that the two

breeds don't look or behave the same. Thus the categories would be distinct so the anomaly depends on the classification system being examined.

Many people in a given culture may not believe in an anomaly that others do, voiding the anomaly in an overall social context due to the fact that many may not adhere to the classification scheme. How many people in a given culture must adhere to the structural scheme in order for it to be valid? Douglas herself states that it may seem she is making too much of the *Lele pango*in cult (173). Perhaps she is, as only a few select people may participate. Research would need to be done to find out how many members of the culture find the animal dangerous or special. Is it a belief due to its anomalous classification or merely social coercion that causes members of the *Lele* to respect the taboo on hunting and eating the animal for the uninitiated? Perhaps certain uninitiated members of the society even kill and eat the creature in secret.

We can examine the rules of Leviticus in a similar fashion. There may be those who adhere to some of the rules. It is doubtful that anyone adheres to them all and in fact many of the rules are so peculiar that modern secularists routinely ridicule devout Christians for certain parts of Leviticus. Excerpts from a chain email circulating around the Internet illustrate this point:

Dear Dr. Laura,

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate. I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the specific laws and how to best follow them.

Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev.19:27. How should they die?

When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord (Lev.1:9). The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness (Lev. 15:19-24). The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

Lev. 25:44 states that I may indeed possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev. 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread. (cotton/polyester blend) He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? (Lev.24:10-16) Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your devoted disciple and adoring fan,  
John Ashcroft. (Attorney General)

Since Leviticus was written thousands of years ago, very little documentation of the larger culture of Israel or the Middle East exists from that period. Is it not reasonable to assume that maybe at the time the book of Leviticus was written that many Israelites thought the rules to be similarly ridiculous? If so, how many of them would have to adhere to the Leviticus structure for it to be valid? Is it enough for just the writer to believe in the structure? Somehow, the structure was created by someone and agreed upon by the other members of the group. How might this process occur? If one individual, such as the author of Leviticus, creates a set of rules based on what he or she considers to be anomalous items in a structure of his or her creation, how would everyone else agree? If that person did not have any authority, the social group would

likely dismiss it as the ravings of a lunatic. In this scenario it would be reasonable to assume that each individual has his or her own structure that he or she adheres to and that others would be unable to tell them what was anomalous or polluting. If this were in fact the case then Structuralism as applied to culture or society would collapse as each individual may be following his or her own rules. However, if the person creating the structure did have a degree of social power or control, it would seem they would be able to coerce the rest of the society to adhere to the rules though force or otherwise. Consequently they would expand their control and influence over the society.

It is unfortunate that Douglas does not address these issues. She seems obsessed with locating anomalies within structures without first asking why the structures exist or how they may have been agreed upon. It is however, an undeniable fact that they do exist. Certainly there is no way to know how most cultural structures were created due to the time elapsed since their genesis. However, if the question is not asked we cannot know with any certainty why one thing is anomalous and another is not because we have no idea who created the structure, why they created the structure and how they might have convinced the rest of the society to adhere to it.

Reality is a fragile concept. One may think they have a table in their room. However, one cannot truly know this, other people must agree that it is indeed a table for the reality to be more than a mere fancy of one mind. But how might we agree upon such issues and who decides to call it a table instead of a chair? If some call it a table and others a *mesa* which is it, is it both or neither? Why might the table be more dangerous than the chair, is it because it lacks a back? Is a chair lacking a back still a chair or is it now a stool? If it were now a stool would not the chair then be anomalous to

the stool and table because it has a back? Or would the table still be the anomaly because the stool and chair are used for sitting and the table is not? If we sat on the table would it still be a table or become a stool? The undeniable truth is that reality is in a constant state of fluctuation. One thing may be another thing while at the same time being something else. One can order and categorize things in an infinite number of ways. Structures can be broken down and rebuilt as something else while being simultaneously something else.

As the minds of human beings expanded and they reordered reality in their own image, they diverged further from their animal brethren. There are some who might argue that this human reordering of reality was the apple offered by the snake in the book of Genesis. The reordering may have indeed been the reason humans were banned from the Garden the rest of the world's creatures inhabit. It is difficult from a post-modern relativist perspective to understand why and how humans may have first begun to structure reality and if or why they chose to agree upon a particular structure. Certainly it made their lives simpler and safer to have an agreed upon mode of ordering the world around them. It allowed for better communication and a shared experience. Still, it seems as though Douglas makes far too much of the polluting anomalies in the structures. Perhaps in some cultures the structures are rigid enough to apply such theories, but even in applying Structuralism toward homosexuals in the modern era seems to be somewhat of an exaggeration. After all, they are winning rights in most industrialized nations and even have the support of many in the cosmopolitan parts of the US. It is difficult to imagine an entire society or human social group sharing the exact same structural idea of reality. Without an identical structure, it is easy to have

different sets of anomalies in a given group, as everything can be reordered based on minute difference. Thus it is extremely difficult to apply one structure to one social group and in many cases even one individual. Structuralism can be seen therefore, as yet another tool one can use to explain cultural phenomena, but certainly not the only one, and perhaps not even the best in many cases. Whenever one attempts to explain anything from a single perspective, such as Douglas has, one will inevitably eliminate certain details and other possibilities. To better understand the reality, the reality needs to be examined from as many perspective structures, or lack thereof, as possible. As there are an infinite number, it is impossible to find one true reality, if only one even exists. But in the quest for reality, we may better understand our world and perhaps more importantly ourselves.

**Reference Page**

Douglas, Mary

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