

Part Eight

Logic and animism

WEIRD people insist that everyone use logic.

Everyone *does* use logic. There are just different kinds of logic, and logic built on different assumptions. What WEIRD people want is everyone to use the form of binary, true-of-false, logic that was created by the classical Greeks, and refined over the last 2,500 years or so, especially the last 500 years.

That form of logic has three basic rules or laws, which make it particularly useful in reasoning about certain kinds of conditions and certain kinds of propositions. These laws are the laws of Identity, Non-contradiction, and the Excluded Middle. Thus, it is heavily structured to deal with either-or propositions, even though much of reality is not so clear-cut.

There are some other assumptions that also go into WEIRD logic, some of which are more accepted than others. Assumptions such as:

- there is nothing beyond the material;
- that we can only know about reality through our senses or those devices we can create to extend our senses;
- that individual experience is not knowledge, but things that can be independently detected and measured by others forms the basis of true knowledge; and

-that mathematics is the best way to describe reality (so much so that some assert that reality IS mathematical, not just that it's useful in describing reality).

And there are some other assumptions:

- the logic we use applies everywhere in the universe;
- the laws of nature we construct apply everywhere in the universe;
- that statistically, the central tendency of data is where the meaning lies, not in the distribution and the outliers. That latter applies to the point that if a miracle were detected, it would either be tossed from the analysis because it was unique, or included with certain modifications, which would result in a distortion in results.

WEIRD thinking is mostly about dichotomies: true/false, either/or; either X or Y, but not both at the same time. The law of Identity states that things have a nature, and ONLY ONE nature—they cannot be two different things at the same time. And each thing can only be that one thing: A is A, A is NOT Not-A, and Not-A is not A.

The law of non-contradiction says that A cannot be Not-A at the same time and in the same sense

Third is the Law of the Excluded Middle. Any given thing is either A or Not-A; it is not possible for something to be A and Not-A at the same time, or even partially A and Not-A.

These three assumptions are basic to classical WEIRD logic. However, in WEIRD philosophy, there are forms of logic that see three possible truth values, such as true/false/indeterminate. There is also intuitional logic, which

replaces the truth values (true/false) with justified/flawed, with some forms including the option of indeterminate, based on whether or not there is sufficient evidence to support the proposition.

There are also forms of logic that see more than three possible truth values, and in fact, some of these logic models abandon the idea of truth altogether in much the same way as intuitional logic. All these multivariate logics work by abandoning to some degree one or more of the three laws that govern binary logic. Some are based in probability, or partial membership in sets.

Even though these alternative forms of logic have been developed, they are not widely recognized or used. Almost everything about Western society is based on application of binary logic.

But binary logic is not how animists think. They see things as being able to have multiple identities at the same time, to thus be contradictory in some senses, to be to some degree both X and Y—what to WEIRD people are mutually exclusive sets—at the same time.

And thus, animistic reasoning is based in a different form of logic than the dominant Western mode, but is very similar to these alternative logics (intuitional, multivalued, fuzzy, for example). Personally, I'm most familiar with Fuzzy Logic, and it works for me as an animist.

Spirit is a fuzzy set. Awareness is another fuzzy set. As is personhood. Or living. Or inanimate. Therefore, fuzzy logic applies when we talk about fuzzy sets. In animism, we do not exclude the middle; things are not just either/or—the either/or is almost always only in our minds, not in the things themselves.

In fact, where we draw boundaries around things is often within our minds and our language, not in the nature of the things themselves. So instead of X is X and Y is Y , X and Y can blend into each other, so that some things may in reality be XY more or less equally, or in some combination, and not X or Y apart. X and Y separately are special cases of XY .

This is rarely formally recognized by practicing indigenous animists, because few indigenous cultures have formalized their thought patterns; it's perhaps only noticeable to a WEIRD person who is trying to become an animist. So, this is not necessarily the way others think or talk about animism, but it makes powerful sense to me.

Graham Harvey finds powerful tools in WEIRD philosophy, including post-modernism, which provide viewpoints and ideas that may be useful in understanding animism, at least for some WEIRD people. I see where he's going with it, but I find I really don't agree...or at least, I don't see that it's necessary.

He talks about pluralism versus monism versus dualism. He worries about the Cartesian Gap. He discusses 'alterities' and 'identities' and other things that indigenous animists seem to never talk about. But if it works for some, then I am encouraged by the effort. After all, Harvey is another WEIRD person who is trying to learn how to be an animist in a modern WEIRD society. So, if it works for him and others, I really don't have a problem with there being postmodern animists.

There of course are other ways to understand animism—certainly, the many practitioners in their various cultures each have their own perspectives. It's not like there is a wrong way and a right way, but it becomes easier to

understand animism if we move away from the Western language and concepts, which often make it difficult to conceive—or even perceive—the nature of animism.

Thinking in fuzzy sets helps me do so. Stepping away from the Western sets with the excluded middle allows us to be very inclusive in what we consider to be persons, and it becomes easier to comprehend the nature of animism when we do this.