

Definitions of primitive thinking

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In sociology and anthropology, societies are divided into two groups, according to how they interpret the world around them: a group is formed by civilized or Western societies, employing science, logic and reason to explain natural phenomena. Another group is formed by primitive or savage societies, employing the myths and legends to understand reality.

Primitive thinking has been defined in different ways throughout history. Here, we will be analyzing three important definitions that have been realized by scholars of sociology, culture and psychology. First, we will analyze the definition of Auguste Comte, who explained from positivism that primitive thinking is a reflection of a society that has not evolved intellectually. Secondly, we will be analyzing the definition of Malinowski, who indicated that primitive thinking is the cultural response of societies to meet human needs. Finally, we will be analyzing the definition of Carl Jung, who said that primitive thinking is a factor rooted in the way society perceives reality.

In 1844, Comte published *Speech on the positive spirit*, a short work that compares the ages of human beings with the ages of societies. The infant stage of societies, which is called the “*theological or fictitious state*”, is that men seek in fetishism, polytheism and monotheism, explanations for those phenomena of nature that cannot understand. The young age of the societies, which is called the “*metaphysical or abstract state*” is a transition period where superstition begins to make a way to the observation to provide a more accurate explanation of nature. And finally, the adult or mature age of societies, called the “*positive or actual state*” is the one reached when society becomes a smart group that, through reason, logic and science, manages to find the true explanation of the surrounding world.

According to the theoretical conception of Comte, science is the absolute truth that serves to measure the level of intellectual development of each society. Therefore, primitive thinking becomes a period of underdevelop-

ment and darkness where men find erroneous answers to their questions. The myths of each society are understood to be a lie that only serves to provide a momentary comfort to men, an explanation that allows them to deal with their biggest fears, a kind of ordinary regulations with which they are deceived.

The theoretical conceptions of primitive thinking regarding Comte have been valued for the contributions that once provided, but above all, have been strongly questioned because the rationalist approach closes on itself, not allowing new insights to illuminate unknown aspects of the object of study. However, this positivist conception still appears sporadically from the academy and often from the social sense when someone performs an interpretive approach to a myth. The comments match, then, in affirming that those sort of narratives are outright lies lacking any scientific basis.

This theoretical approach, besides reducing the sacred richness of all myths to devoid of scientific evidence, also has a further highly questionable aspect: leading to the acceptance that primitive societies are at a stage in which have not reached full intellectual evolution, during childhood or the “*theological or fictitious state*”, a stage exhibiting *weaker powers of our human nature*, a stage which demonstrate *bad cultivated minds*, with an *equivocal character* (Comte, 1984, p. 33).

Since the conception of Malinowski (1960), the way how to understand a primitive society does not consist in comparing it with the civilized society starting from the scope that both have gained in the field of science or technology, nor is it possible to define them as those that have failed to find the rational and logical explanations of natural phenomena. Indeed, for Malinowski, primitive societies are characterized by responses found to solve their basic needs. Their myths, their beliefs, their tools, their household utensils, weapons, their gods and their parties, finally, their cultural expressions are, ultimately, the way to meet the basic needs of survival in an environment that should be mastered.

This theoretical approach, named by the same Malinowski (1960) as a functionalist (because every cultural aspect arises from a natural necessity), is also widely implemented to interpret the Andean cosmology from both the academic sphere and from the social sense. Many people, however, come to absurdly reduce this theory stating, for example, that the widow is an invention of primitive thinking so that married men do not fall into infidelity, preserving the monogamous institution and ensuring the development of the family. That the old woman from the mount, is another lie of primitive thinking to ensure that indigenous and peasant carry out farming, ranching and

hunting practices that do not alter the ecosystem, maintaining the sustainability of natural resources. The elf, indicate, is the funniest invention of primitive thinking to teach virgins the value of chastity and, at the same time to show them the disorder to those who can come up with the unbridled infatuation. Such spirit of the primitive, say, shows that society that the conjugal union should be outbred and inbred; that other story, they say, has the functionality to tell that society what is forbidden and what is allowed when they go hunting. And so on, the cosmogony of the Andes is reduced to a list of fictional beings or irrational lies whose function is to regulate social behavior, to ensure the survival of the human species from the cohabitation and security in obtaining food.

Jung (2000) qualifies as a European mistake to think that the origin of savage or primitive thinking is the need to explain natural phenomena and generate a social regulations. The difference between the primitive and the civilized does not resides in that one resorts to superstition and the other to science, that one believes in myths and other one in theories. No, the difference for Jung rather lies in the way of how from thought both conceive the language. Civilized people, when communicating, reified images, that is to say, every sign is attributed one thing. For example: by saying hot or cold they do not think a disembodied attribute but rather right away they represent it by means of one thing. Instead, the primitive has an extraordinary power of sensuousness allowing it to communicate without binding the signs of things: if you talk about your ancestor you do not need to relate the word with one thing, the mind is capable of recreating the ancestor to see and hear about it.

The positions of Jung, Comte and Malinowski, are ultimately a contempt for primitive thinking, because they end up placing it below civilized thinking depriving it of all wealth thinking and considering it only as a wrong or rude worldview. In Jung's theory (1921), the primitive must learn to correctly master the mental images of the mind so that it is level with the civilized, who when communicating are able to control its sensory perceptions to avoid creating nonexistent images. In Comte's theory, the primitive must abandon fetishism and dive into rationalism to exceed at last the stage "in which human intelligence is still below the simplest scientific problems" (p. 28). And in the functionalist theory of Malinowski (1960), the primitive must reconsider the interest that moves it to create a culture for utilitarian purposes, to advance, just as the civilized does, the possibility of understanding the world with the intention to increase their knowledge. With everything, the **contributions** that these three researchers conducted in their areas of knowledge are far above any qualms that they are able to insinuate.

This text was taken from the unpublished work *La Moledora: el último mito de los Pastos*.

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