

CULTURAL AMNESIA, AN INTERVIEW WITH ERIC L. MILLER

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Q. What is "Cultural Amnesia" as opposed to "Collective Amnesia"?

A. In *Worlds In Collision* Velikovsky proposes that mankind may be suffering from a "Collective Amnesia". That is to say, that due to the catastrophes of the past, mankind has blocked out their memory of them. This was not because there were no literate men, or that the record of these events was destroyed. Velikovsky contends, but because the events were too terrifying to be remembered. It was out of legends comparable to disassociated memories and their distorted equivalents in the lives of a people" that he was able to reconstruct the event. Actually the history of catastrophism is a long one, and numerous authors have considered that the earth had probably experienced huge geological displacements within recorded history. Also, some authors have also believed that comets were the cause of these events. But Velikovsky's unparalleled contribution lay in fixing a date and identifying the agent. But of this question of amnesia, let us look at it closer.

It seems to me that it is difficult to get a true perspective on the question. There are many factors that contribute to this problem. When one views the question from an historical point of view, one sees that repeatedly in the past the question of whether geological changes have occurred gradually or abruptly (catastrophically) has come to debate within scientific circles. Velikovsky in his books has documented some of the main developments in this history. One needs only turn to the pages of world literature to see how many references occur to the association between comets and physical catastrophes. Shakespeare, Poe, Byron, Dostoyevsky, Camus, Mann and others, to name but a few, have kept alive the traditions of belief in comets and disasters. By doing so, they have offered psychological understandings of character and motivations.

Actually in many cases this was accomplished through the artist revelations of mythic identification. We will return to this issue. At any rate, at various times in history the question has been consciously debated: Catastrophism vs. Gradualism--more than a few times were involved in considering these issues. In most instances the appearance of comets themselves occasionally renewed interest. Velikovsky asks why was it necessary to carry out research to discover these things--in other words why has catastrophism been suppressed, if not repressed? If we give emphasis to suppression our considerations immediately assume a political character, if we give emphasis to repression than the psychological attain a more fundamental significance. And it can be argued for the psychological in both instances.

Q. If for the moment we consider the issue from a political point of view -- do you think there is a group who is behind suppressing Velikovsky's theory for political reason--if so, who is the group?

A. Well, that is not to say that there is a group of people who *know* that there have been catastrophes in man's past and who actively seek to repress the theory solely for political reasons. On the other hand, it is not difficult to see the point of view. Simply stated, I mean to say that it may very well be there are many people in positions of authority who would be threatened by the new knowledge. There is nothing new or unheard of in this. Velikovsky's work brings many field of enquiry open to a new evaluation. There are no doubt many persons in the field of science, religion, and education who may feel personally threatened for fear of a loss of self-estimation and importance if it turned out that many of the theories and beliefs they teach are not so bound to truth as they imagined. I'm reminded of the words of a character in Camus' play *State of Siege*, published in 1947. The Astrologer, ironically enough, says:

. . . Lakes and Gentlemen let me cast your horoscope. The past, present and the future guaranteed by the fixed stars. The *fixed* stars, mind you! (aside) For if comets take a hand in it, I'll have to look round for another job.

At any rate, this somewhat humorously makes a serious point. But when I say "political" I mean not political in a restrictive sense but in a wide sense.

Q. But to whose benefit would it be? Certainly you are not suggesting that, should Velikovsky be proven right, noted authorities in fields of education or science would lose their jobs?

A. No, but I'm not suggesting that but we see that what is called gradualism or uniformitarianism has become a kind of dogma in the various learning intuitions throughout the world. Dogma is always defended out of self-interest, or what is narrowly thought of as self-interest. Then added to this are the various religious dogmas. Such an understanding as the Velikovsky point of view might--and has, occasioned fears of offending against a sacred or magical interpretation of history.

Many religions might feel that Velikovsky's work would undermine their particular religious claims to authority. And even that global catastrophe would tend to dilute racist claims to being the exclusively chosen people of the world. We see that the interest of authoritarian education, as well as authoritarian political views, and authoritarian religious beliefs might all feel threatened by new knowledge which would give a different interpretation of fundamentalist claims. The "rulers" might think it against their interests—just as the Copernicans world-view of heliocentricity caused great upheaval in the religious and educational circles, so too, Velikovsky's work has met with similar resistance.

No doubt it was thought that mankind would not be able to assimilate this new knowledge and that it was deemed a "dangerous truth." This leads us to the issue at hand -- the protection of the people from knowledge that is disturbing, perhaps not so much to the people, who could only gain by it, but disturbing to those who gain their *raison d'ete*, so to speak, for professing knowledge of certain irrefutable truths. If mankind is suffering from amnesia, it may be an amnesia that we have created.

Q. What do you mean by that, an amnesia that we created?

A. Amnesia is a relative term. To forget something presupposes that one was once in possession of the knowledge, and that due to psychic shock of one sort or another that knowledge was lost, displaced, or forgotten. Now the question arises: is it proper to characterize lack of knowledge and "amnesia" which is not directly the result of psychic shock? One might easily imagine the answer to be no. We are dealing with two important questions, a theory of consciousness and a theory of psychic time. An assumed theory of consciousness implicit in *World In Collision* is the theory of a collective consciousness *a la* Jung, along with the Freudian theory of repression.

Jung believed that there exists a collective unconscious mind, which acts as a repository of ideas derived from primal times--"outside of history" as Jung himself has said. Now the point is that the diagnosis of Collective Amnesia seems to imply the Jungian conception. This idea, which has merit, above and beyond these specific considerations, is an important one to the idea of universal amnesia resulting from past catastrophes. Apparently, if I interpret Velikovsky's terms properly, he would accept Jung's basic premise with an important qualification. Velikovsky would probably deny that these symbol-ideas occurred "outside of history," but rather in a great many instances actually veil the event of a physical catastrophe, and even a series of them.

What Jung calls arch-types are repressed ideas which in their distorted forms reveal, as dreams do to a psychoanalyst, the presence of a psychoneurotic tension created by past catastrophes. Velikovsky as a physical catastrophist would see these things from a different point of view. You see the work of most conventional and unconventional psychoanalysts assume the science of gradualism. Obviously, if they believed physical catastrophes have occurred in the past their interpretations would be qualitatively different.

Viewed from this perspective, Velikovsky's scientific catastrophism stands in direct opposition to the gradualist scientism of Darwin. For

example, Velikovsky as an historical reductionist sees trauma implicit in the cultural consciousness. But logically he must also have a theory of consciousness which supports continuity of the psychic trauma or rather its mechanism of continuity. The approach is no less credulous than is Jung's conception of archetypal states of mind.

Q. But couldn't it be argued that this is not Jungian at all? For what he is referring to is not temporal even, but a kind of mythic consciousness whose roots are even more basic, even deeper than man's conceptions of history?

A. Yes, that is true and I do not wish to oversimplify Jung's conception for the purpose of explicating some of the implications of Velikovsky's diagnosis. However, we can beg the question by asking is that "historical time" remembered time? In other words, perhaps the mythic hero stories resulted from an historical event catastrophe, that it was a physical catastrophe which gave rise to the stories--in a great many cases at least. These mythic states of mind are the distorted mythologicalized equivalents of real events. Philosophically Velikovsky is probably an empiricist.

Q. Before you go on with this I would like to ask this. Are you saying that Velikovsky accepts the idea of timeless states of mind, as in Jung's idea of arch-types, but rejects the fact of their timelessness and actually wants to have them created a merely 3,500 years ago?

A. I don't know what Velikovsky thinks; rather I am attempting to give my opinion of what are some of the questions we must entertain in examining the question of "Collective Amnesia." Your statement of the problem of time does not fit the problem. I am saying that Jung may have been correct in believing there was a collective unconscious mind, the collected experiences of the species man, contained in himself physically--that is, every child is born with pre-existing ideas; the history of man is born anew with every birth. If that is true every child would seem to be born, from that point of view, with a catastrophically conditioned psychoneurosis--amnesia with regard to a certain area of his history.

If the subconscious mind is most closely akin to what we call the dream state there would, of logical necessity, have to be catastrophically conditioned dream-imagery. Or put it in an even more precise Jungian framework, the individual would have an "innate" capacity for forming catastrophically conditioned hero-myths. These would be seen as symptoms of the disturbance. But, I would like to clarify this, this would not have to be seen as negative expressions of the distress, but could even be seen in the most positive of lights—i.e., that it is because man was capable of creating out of his deepest inner conflicts the beauty and ennobling richness of the ancient myths that man was able to come to an understanding of his malady—not just an understanding of his malady, not just an understanding in the limited sense of scientific knowledge, but in the sense of an inner revelation guided and giving with it a richer sense of his own humanity. These myths give a more important truth than just a mechanical understanding of events-- though they, too, are important--but address themselves to the future in the more meaningful moral truth and beauty to the daily concerns of man. Oedipus for example let us consider for a moment.

A crime has been committed. Thebes is in a plague because of the crime of patricide. The embers glow in the temple of Pallas Athena (Venus) as a signal from the gods of bad things to come. Oedipus who is believed to have saved the people by his superior wit (not because of the gods) is now called upon to save the people from another catastrophe. But Oedipus is a breaker of the moral code, an offender against the gods, and has to be punished. He is charged with high crimes including incest, most terrible of crimes. He murdered mother and father, the father by murder and the mother by murder through physical love with her. But Oedipus refuses to accept these crimes as in neither case did he truly offend against the man, as father, or against the mother, as lover; in both cases he did not know of his intimate relationship. He who was so witty lacked knowledge. But when it came to finding the villain, he found only himself.

Oedipus went through a crisis of identification--a basic value conflict with himself, his family, his country. He who was most innocent is now most guilty, and he himself played the decisive role in unmaking the truth where wit had won him a crown and privilege, now it had given

him only pain and the title of “Criminal.” From the moral heights to the moral depths! Suffering out his fate the sun is blinded from his eyes, and he lives a personal catastrophe of The Fall. Viewed from a Freudian view point it is all been a desire to murder the father and have sex with the mother. And if one interpreted the play from a Velikovsky point of view, it is a catastrophe. Jung would see it as an example of the immemorial myth replayed into history. We can see these points of view are not so divergent. We might even take the view that had Jung known a different science he might have come to these same opinions on his own, they need not be disturbed at their-- it is merely a catastrophic accretion, so to speak. Freud, too, would probably be satisfied as he could still maintain his belief in the Oedipal Complex and show that catastrophe was merely an accretion to the basic patricide problem—that even if there were a catastrophe we would merely discover that was interpreted from the fundamental fact of the patricide--that basic truth giving direction to why man interpreted the event from the desire of the original crime--at any rate, I mention this to point out issues of interpretation fundamental beliefs, even if V's work is accepted by science as fact.

Q. Can you get back to Jung’s Collective Unconscious and Velikovsky’s Collective Amnesia? You were saying, I believe, that the Collective Consciousness has been traumatized by catastrophe and that this traumatic condition is passed on hereditarily?

A. No, I do not say that I believe this or even that Velikovsky does, only that I believe these are some of the questions which we must think about concerning the subject. Jung believes the Collective Consciousness is a physical fact, consequently I would assume that this would be true also for Collective Amnesia.

Q. If that is implied in the term, do you agree with it?

A. No, if these are valid associations then I would say I disagree with the intellectual perspective.

Q. In what way?

A. Well, I do not believe there is such a thing as a genetically traumatized unconsciousness, nor in a catastrophic psychological reductionism. This is to say, I do not believe in it any more than I believe in some eternally tranquil psychological reductionism. I do not believe in any kind of psychological reductionism.

Q. What do you mean psychological reductionism?

A. Yes, this is worth clarifying. I am one of those persons who believe Velikovsky's evidence support his theory of physical catastrophe. In that sense I believe in historical reductionism. Further I can believe that, accepting the premise, mankind suffered a great psychic as well as physical shock, and that many of man's basic cultural values are directly related to these catastrophes. But that does not mean that I believe the fundamental psychoneurotic compulsion of mankind's negative behavior was or is caused by an historical event--that man's psychological ills can be reduced to catastrophe as a generic cause. Actually, to believe such a thing--if anyone does believe it, is to really translate Freud's death instinct theory into physical terms, in other words to give it a naturalistic base. So, to conclude I do not believe in any genetic theory of catastrophe and man's fate. Still, in all fairness we must realize that the V viewpoint is greatly more positive than Freud's view. It may be the Velikovsky himself does not accept a genetic theory of amnesia.

Q. Why couldn't the mind be catastrophically conditioned, couldn't there even be a physiological reaction to the catastrophe which was passed on from generation to generation--or do you discount all theories of genetic transference of acquired characteristics?

A. I do not think that is the issue. For if one accepts the premise where are we to find those who are not catastrophically conditioned as the control to determine the degree of physiological effect. Who is to define the elements from an objective point of view and what are the fundamental assumptions of the scientific or logical methodology? There are logical difficulties, I believe, in these kinds of considerations. This is why, I believe it is probably better to think of the question of

known (knowledge) and not-known (amnesia) about past catastrophes in terms of Cultural Amnesia rather than collective amnesia-- it is an important point. I hesitate to even use the term amnesia and yet particularly in the individual case I think it is proper.

Q. Before you go into that let me ask a question. Are you saying you reject the idea of collective unconscious? What about people who speak in tongues, what about Jung's work? Psychic phenomena are closely related to these questions, isn't it?

A. I agree that the speaking of ancient tongues might be seen as strong evidence for a theory of a collective unconscious. In fact, the case of Edgar Cayce, his whole biography in fact, might well argue for a theory of collective unconscious.

Q. Cayce's work, as I recall, contains a theory of psychic phenomenon, doesn't it, which related to the collective unconscious. If I remember right he said the past, present, and future were on an energy planes, actually a spiral like this.

The point is the receiver of psychic communications. In the outer orbits are either point masses, which represent other people-- with whom he is getting into contact. The distances are relative, since the geometric system is a spiral. From one point of view there is a center and mass at varying distances in a lineal fashion, however they are distributed. Distance is defined by relationship to a fixed point. This perspective takes into account pace and mass, but, in addition, each point mass is itself a radiating and receiving center and this relationship allows one to telepathically tune in with another person, instantaneously. If one wanted to look at it from the view of modern physics we need to imagine the phenomenon from a holographic point of view in three dimensional space. Each center is itself the reference beam and the object which sets up the interference pattern. Perhaps people who speak ancient tongues merely tap into this collective unconscious and have direct continuity with historical catastrophism. Why couldn't it be that this shock created its own interference pattern which is in psychic simultaneity with the present even if the idea of its genetic corollary is denied?

A. Well, you've mentioned a number of things. Your remarks on Cayce are quite interesting. My own researches have led me to discard this approach, however. I have found that Cayce borrowed much from Ouspensky, the great Russian philosopher and that while his views are most valuable to a theory of psychic phenomena they do suffer the insufficiency of a more rigorous logical point of view. The crux of my main objection lies in Ouspensky's translogical thought forms. The issue is that any limitations are required of any designate conception. For example, when it came to giving readings of the past, Cayce said that he tuned in on the Akashic records, where all things are told, there lies all knowledge of the past, present and future. There are great logical difficulties in proving any conception to be eternally true. Even if we assumed there was a dimension of truth, still the transfer of that truth from one human being to another is subject to human error--so once again, we cannot ultimately know if a particular expression of that truth is totally valid. --

C. But to return to the main issue. I think a better approach to the problem would be one that would be able to "explain"-- or at least be able to interpret such phenomena as speaking tongues. When it is reported that people speak ancient tongues in a state of sleep or hypnotic trance we must not assume necessarily that this phenomenon is a tapping in of ancient collective consciousness. It is reasonable to assume that they are able to telepathically tap in on this language data either through their own subconscious or from the subconscious of another.

Q. Then you believe there is such a thing as telepathy.

A. Yes. I don't think there is much doubt about it.

Q. But what does this have to do with collective amnesia from your point of view?

A. As I've stated a theory of consciousness must take these things into consideration and it should at least attempt to deal with these difficult

questions. But let's consider the example of Edgar Cayce--perhaps I can make myself clearer.

- Q. Yes, I think that's a good idea. I think I'm getting a little confused by all of this. I mentioned Cayce in the first place only to point out. . .
- A. If I may continue. And I'll go into this to highlight the subject of cultural amnesia. I'll give a little biographical material which I believe is pertinent to this discussion. Edgar Cayce was born into a family which had a previous history of psychic phenomena. His grandfather and grandmother, in particular, were noted for their psychic talents. Edgar grew up in a fundamentalist family. His father was authoritarian and the mother apparently submissive. Edgar's father was cruel in many ways and Edgar showed a penchant for dreamy states of mind. At an early age he had a catastrophic "vision" -- with angels, heavenly hosts, etc. This is not so unusual and many children are given to such experiences. What is different about Edgar is that he continued to have such experiences. Edgar read the bible some 15 times before he was 13 and at an early age he was taught about religion by one of the many wives of Joseph Smith.

At any rate, Edgar grew up fearful that he was different, absorbed in a dreamy world, treated badly by his father -- over-indulged by his grandmother, etc. From a very early age Edgar was told that he was set aside by God to do special things. He had a life time dream to become a Dr. and a messenger of God -- like one of the prophets of old. Edgar was excessively shy as a child and had a great talent of telling believable stories about Egyptian Pharaohs and others. No doubt he was assisted by his great exposure to the bible. At any rate, he discovered he could read the contents of a closed book by sleeping on it. Previously a poor student (his father beat him because he was a slow learner) he now began to excel in his studies. Later he lost the gift and did poorly in his studies again--which may have displeased his father even more since he had made the judgment about the poor boy that he was dumb. The father and the boy never got along well and little affection was exchanged between them.