

On Snakes

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On Snakes - I

Common Sense

Writing about snakes in the Year of the Snake is an utterly clichéd thing to do. To turn one's back on cliché, however, is an act more clichéd still. Heartened somewhat by this thought, and remembering Jules Renard's pithy comment about the snake – 'Snake: too long' – I began preparing myself to join those who have taken the creature on. Medusa's head of snakes; the serpent that tempted Eve; Zarathustra's adder; the spirit of the White Snake from the Japanese children's story; the winged serpents defeated by Theseus; the legend of the Yamata no Orochi; the snake charmer in Henri Rousseau's painting; the 'Green General', otherwise known as the Japanese Rat Snake, that is thought to be a kind of house spirit; a friend of mine's morbid fear of snakes; and so on – my head filled with a suitably sinuous chain of thoughts, I came to the (again quite commonplace) conclusion that snakes are really very unsettling creatures, and decided to try to figure out why.

Thinking about it, this irrational fear of snakes is something that has perplexed me since I was a schoolboy, precisely because of its irrationality. There is something very mysterious about the snake's power to unsettle, a quality which differs from that of being simply frightening. People who are not troubled by snakes at all are generally thought of as weird. Compared to the fear of wild beasts, which we might call mechanical, a fear of snakes appears utterly visceral in nature. We should not, however, seek an explanation for it by bracketing snakes together with other things possessing the quality of 'slipperiness'. Yams are also slippery, as are frogs. Moreover, according to those who have actually touched the creatures, snakeskin is not actually very slippery at all. Could this common slipperiness assumption actually be the doing of our emotions, arrived at through a fetishistic association of snakes with sex? No, we should definitely not seek to explain the viscerally unsettling nature of snakes with comparisons based on their appearance; we would be better off considering the most primitive component of the human, the realm of that kind of fetishised, irrational thinking which Levy-Bruhl called 'pre-logical'. Or must we go back still further, to times that pre-date even what we call the human being; must we look at those creatures that spent half their lives clambering around up trees, perhaps around the time when they were beginning to do so with

less ease? The sight of a bird frightened by a snake leaves a lasting impression. It is not hard to imagine how much more terrifying snakes would be to tree-dwelling creatures.

However, as a disciple of the behaviourist Pavlov, I conceive of memory as a linguistic function through and through, and cannot ally myself with unscientific thoughts about embodied memory, primitive reminiscences and suchlike. Accordingly, I can hardly believe in hereditary memories, and would have to feel considerable reluctance in declaring our fear of snakes to be a remnant of our tree-dwelling life. This kind of thinking seems to me no more than a popular rationalisation, formulated in reaction to the unsettling effect that snakes have on us. Carry this line of thought to its extreme and we would end up seeking to explain the phenomenon by looking back to a time tens of millions of years ago when mammals were subordinate to reptiles. This is what happens when thought is mechanised by 'common sense'.

This was the direction my ideas were taking when I realised that, far from getting to grips with the snake, I had on the contrary produced a specimen of truly serpentine prose, and that, if I carried on like this, I was certain to end up entangling myself even further. It would be far wiser to leave all the posturing behind and adopt a scientific method, focusing on the straightforward exposition of the snake's essence. That would probably suit me better. Looking back on my thoughts up until now, I can see that I have indeed been posturing too much. With all this talk of unsettling effects and so on, I have ultimately been simply circling around the word 'snake', trying to keep as far away as possible from the creature itself. Fancy words are just linguistic cosmetics. For one thing, I just said that I was going to speak straightforwardly about snakes, but it is now three o'clock in the morning, and as I am unable either to send a messenger down to a snake shop or call in at the zoo, that seems destined to remain pure talk. Given these circumstances, how about leaving the snakes alone and concentrating just on their unsettling quality instead? Now, having written that, I shall not feel content until I have brought the matter to a satisfactory conclusion; if that indicates a defect in my personality then so be it. I would very much like to lift the veil of mystery from the snake...

Right, I say to myself, two cigarettes and a short while later. I am not losing my senses: to set my sights on the unsettling quality itself was not such a bad idea. Just as with Zarathustra's obedient adder, the snake has been summarily transfigured into an intellectualisation, a logical entity. From a physiological perspective, a fear which unsettles us is a kind of psychological dysfunction. Our perception of external events and our reactions to them can be understood as the conjunction of various conditioned reflexes; if these reflexes occur within a highly complex environment, it is not hard to imagine how they would become extremely confused, giving rise to dysfunctional reactions,

especially in those cases where the objects of perception cannot be entirely understood. Now that human socialisation has reached an advanced level, the phenomenon of linguistically-mediated reflexes – or what we call the conscious life – has become extremely widespread and entirely normalised. The realm of common sense with its supremely complex structure is largely made up of elements which are habitually reduced to the status of symbols. Is it not then perfectly natural that, when confronted with something inexplicable which forcefully demands a reaction from us, our ‘common sense reflex system’ is thrown into a state of confusion and freezes up, and that this physiological dysfunction comes to our consciousness as a sense of the uncanny? Snakes exist very closely alongside us in our lives, yet appear in unexpected places at unexpected moments; their mode of life is difficult for us to understand; and they take a shape for which it is hard to find an analogy. Their capacity to produce in us this kind of dysfunctional disturbance is thus inevitable. This must doubtless be the source of the entire mystery surrounding the snake. Myths and pre-logic have evolved in order to enable us to fit into our body of common sense the disturbance in our common sense itself.

I feel extremely satisfied with this conclusion and have regained my confidence, but I am of course aware that, having used the word ‘scientific’, I should expect some response concerning the possibility of providing proof. Given my unfortunate lack of snakes to hand, I regret that I cannot give a report of any proof of the experimental kind. I can, however, offer a guarantee of a logical nature that my theory could be proved. What needs to be done is to force ophidiophobics to accustom themselves to snakes. They must be made to habituate themselves physically to every aspect of the snake. They should be convinced to spend their everyday life alongside snakes, touching them, watching them, and eating snake meat; furthermore, they should be made to pursue a course of zoological study about snakes. I myself would very much like to carry out this experiment on my snake-hating friend in the near future, but financial considerations make me hesitate. The amount of money I would have to pay a friend assume the role of guinea pig in this kind of experiment would doubtless be considerable. If there is anyone out there reading this article who has sufficient financial resources and a good deal of patience, I would certainly recommend them carrying out the experiment. There is no doubt they would discover their friend would be freed from their terror of snakes and begin instead to feel for them an affection similar to that which they might also feel towards, say, cats.

So, now that it seems I am back on track, it must be time for me to start producing some really juicy morsels, like ‘Snake: too long.’ With this one phrase, the snake is converted instantaneously into a

single object. The snake, which doesn't want to become an object any more than it wishes to become part of our body of commonsense knowledge, has been promptly objectified. So there is nothing remaining to say on the subject. Besides, I've already decided to leave the posturing behind.

At this point, thinking about the effect of snakes on our body of commonsense knowledge, my thoughts leapt without warning to Ritchie Calder's book, *Men Against The Desert*.

I think it would be fair to say that commonsense knowledge is the most conservative element of our lives. Certainly it is an entirely passive element; metaphorically speaking, a *world of blindness*.

Within it, the external world exists only as code. Language is not a tool that refers to the external world through abstraction, but rather the sound of a bell used to guide a blind person; we could also think of it as a telephone through which we receive orders from the external world. It is often said that language developed in feudalistic society as a means of giving commands. The citizens engaged only in a circumscribed range of actions, sitting in dark rooms and waiting for commands from outside. For order to prevail, the external world must be conceptualised as a void. The culture that arises from this passivity is nothing but a refinement and a complexification of common sense.

It goes without saying that, within our body of commonsense knowledge, the desert can only be thought of as a void, at most a void with caravans, oases, and foreign soldiers; or else in terms of the suffering of Saint Anthony, or of ancient ruins. Yet, even if our consciousness remains sitting comfortably inside this room of commonsense knowledge, the body is bound to be constantly brushing up against the outside world, for such is the human condition. When the commands coming down the telephone become incapable of regulating the relationship between the body and the external world, and our body begins to demand that our consciousness leaves the room of common sense, then a revolution of consciousness takes place. It is the capacity for experiencing this kind of revolution, with which humans have been equipped from the beginning, that is called progress.

Whenever a revolution like this takes place, humans discover that not only is the external world not a void, but that reality is in fact infinitely rich; they see this and, with a huge, hopeful shudder, they open their eyes.

It is its treatment of this idea that makes *Men Against The Desert* fascinating. The book allows the reader to comprehend the affirmative brilliance of creation from the void, a brilliance which comes with seeing the outside world as a subject of transformation. No, scrap the literary expressions; the void never existed. Ultimately, there were only ever the walls of our common sense. The moment that we turn to face reality with the eyes of a revolutionary, then, regardless of whether or not we

begin spouting mysterious-sounding incantations, the walls of the commonsense world will disappear like a dream chased away by an alarm clock.

This is not to say that I do not have my reservations when it comes to *Men Against The Desert*. I do, and they arise particularly when it deals with obstacles of a political nature. Is it not perfectly obvious that if the fight against political obstacles is taken to its limit, what will lie ahead is nothing other than a human desert? The book brought to mind a desert of the spirit when, as soon as it turned from considering the actual desert to the desert of society, it regressed back to the body of common sense. I think the sequel would have to begin by grappling with the spiritual desert.

To put the legs on the snake – as we say in Japanese of a superfluous act or utterance – I am keenly aware of this kind of reliance on common sense as a flaw in recent peace theories. Even if we suppose that humans are essentially peace-loving creatures, the world of common sense has always been fundamentally conservative; hence, in so far as a peace theory is commonsensical, its nature will necessarily change. Because peace theories are stable only when they are based on common sense, anyone devoting themselves to peace will also have to devote themselves to an understanding of its desert-like nature. So the legs are now on and I have, in some sense, produced a piece of writing to celebrate the Year of the Snake.

On Snakes - II

In One Particular Year of the Snake

Before they got to the point of coming out with pithy phrases like ‘Snake: too long’, most people would be overcome by a feeling of repulsion. This repulsion is of a different order of magnitude to that which some feel towards, say, dogs or cats; in extreme cases, just seeing a photo of a snake is enough to make people weak at the knees and turn their stomachs. Luckily, I don’t hate snakes quite that much. When it comes to centipedes and other creepy-crawlies, however, I experience a shock positively electric in nature just upon catching sight of one of the things, so it should be possible for me to reason by analogy to a certain extent as far as the psychology of ophidiophobia goes.

So what is the true nature of this visceral repulsion when it comes to snakes? Although ophidophobia is a fairly common condition, this issue remains curiously unexplored. We can hardly claim to believe them to be devils, but on the other hand, saying that they are unsettling just because they unsettle us is tantamount to throwing in the towel. Of the commonplace explanations for the fear of snakes that do exist, the only one that seems at first sight to be truly rational is the idea of ancient

memory I mentioned previously. When our ancestors lived in trees, as they once did, snakes were their most fearsome enemies. You could go so far as to say that the theory that we inherited memories from that period, and that those memories lie dormant in our consciousness, is supported, more or less, by the theory of evolution.

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Yet when scrutinised, this hypothesis also turns out to be very suspect. First of all, there is the question of whether our ancestors ever really lived in trees. Is it not rather that it was when those creatures came out of the trees and began living on the ground that they separated themselves from monkeys, and became what we can call our human ancestors? If so, then the true enemies of humans would instead be the four-legged carnivores. Yet, while we experience fear towards these four-legged beasts, we do not feel the kind of revulsion towards them that we do towards snakes. Clearly, this represents an inconsistency in our theory.

The second doubt to be raised here concerns the heritability of memory. Theories positing the heredity of traits acquired after birth are not unheard of, but I have never heard of any theories positing the heredity of memory. If this were possible then, as I have noted before, it is doubtless that the development of society would render elementary education unnecessary, and children would start entering secondary school at the age of seven. However we look at it, the indubitable fact remains that a situation so promising as to make the hypothesis of inherited memory credible does not exist anywhere in the world.

For these reasons it seems that, regrettably enough, this theory is not to be trusted after all. Having reached this conclusion, I thought things over, and just when I had finished thinking them over, it occurred to me: the notion of a psychological allergy. Humans depend a good deal on cutaneous respiration, so we feel a physiological revulsion towards slimy surfaces. The slimy feeling of snake skin is the real reason for the discomfort we feel towards snakes.

In reality, however, snake skin is absolutely not slimy. It would be closer to the truth to say that it is a little rough. As a matter of fact, it is fish that are truly the slimy ones; yet the person who catches sight of a goldfish and finds him- or herself frozen to the spot in terror is about one in a million. It looks as if I had better put my psychological allergy theory to one side.

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What other explanations does that leave? Staring at a photo of a snake in an illustrated book of animals, I racked my brain. What is the snake? A long, limbless thing, very different to those kinds of creatures which intimidate their opponents using displays of extraordinary exaggeration: growing

horns, baring fangs and similar. If anything, the sense of discomfort that the snake brings about originates precisely in its lack of those features we expect every creature to have.

Jackpot, I thought. If this is anxiety brought on by a lack of certain features, then it is akin to the fear of ghosts. The distinguishing feature of ghosts is, simply stated, their disconnection from the world of the living; to put it another way, a lack of the quotidian. The existence of a ghost is first acknowledged when it materialises in someone's presence. Ghosts who have yet to materialise are not deemed to exist at all. You will not find any ghost stories speaking about the daily life of ghosts. Such an account, if it existed, would only appear in a comedy or a comic strip.

On this point, and forgive me for repeating myself, but the situation with snakes is extremely similar. The limbless snake appears suddenly from a narrow hole. In practice, this appearance is probably relatively sudden, but psychologically speaking it is even more so. It is a terribly troubling fact that the snake, which unlike the cat and so on has none of the limbs we are familiar with and which instead comes smoothly sliding out as one long torso, can be little anthropomorphised. In other words it is, to all intents and purposes, impossible to imagine what the snake's interior world might be like. For this reason, it appears to us that it materialises all of a sudden out of a void lacking in any kind of everyday quality, in the same way as ghosts do.

This difficulty associated with anthropomorphising the snake applies equally to those creatures who have rather too many legs, like centipedes and other creepy-crawlies. Either way, our inability to imagine their everyday existence is deeply unsettling for us. Insofar as we are able to use comparative thinking to envisage the daily life of a creature, however scary a creature it may be, the possibility of psychological conquest is ours.

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In other words, humans are creatures who desperately cling to the wall of the quotidian. Supported by the everyday presumption that today will be like yesterday, and tomorrow will be just like today, we are able to accept society and social order as our reality. Yet if we cling too tightly to that wall, then there is a risk that our field of vision grows extremely narrow, and everything outside of that field comes to seem to us like ghosts and snakes.

I have no intention of denying the importance of the quotidian. However, is it not essential for our mental health that we take a breath of air from another source every now and then? It is said that snake charmers, who deal with snakes on a day-to-day basis, genuinely feel no sense of disgust towards them. Moreover, this phenomenon is not limited to real-life snakes, but applies also to political snakes, ideological snakes, cultural snakes and snakes of every other kind.

Whatever type of snake we are dealing with, if we dare to draw closer, we will certainly find that it has its own particular kind of quotidian life. Getting close to a snake doesn't necessarily entail getting swallowed alive.

On Snakes - III

In old-fashioned experimental medicine, diseases were classified purely in terms of their symptoms: stomach ache, for example, or dizziness, or high temperature. Now that scientific knowledge about the human body has progressed, we no longer make those kinds of classifications. What we call 'stomach ache' can be simple gastro-intestinal catarrh, or a kind of flu, or it can be psychosomatic. What we call 'flu' can have different symptoms: gastroenterological symptoms, bronchial symptoms, feverish and headachy symptoms, and so on.

However, in the realm of psychopathology, which the scientific method has not yet fully pervaded, we see the kind of classifications typical of this old-fashioned medicine still being made. Although advances have been made thanks to developments in neuropathology, the nature of the physiological mechanism that connects the *psyche* and the *soma* remains as shrouded in mystery as ever. Of course, Pavlov's theory of conditioning represents an attempt to overcome this mystery, but acceptance of this theory is not yet widespread in Japan. Scientific prejudice constitutes a great impediment in this respect.

It is not that psychopathology is particularly unscientific as a field, but rather that it is one in which the various methodological deficiencies of modern science have come together. In other words, because the methodology for general physiology has been incorporated robotically into the realm of psychology, its deformities have been exacerbated, to the point that it is now displaying medically-verifiable signs of regression. This only serves to strengthen the resistance to the Pavlovian method, providing us with an example of a robotic, materialistic prejudice against dialectical materialism.

A similar prejudice exists within the different ways of thinking about the subject of prejudice itself. With this approach prejudices are listed individually, like a register of the animals in a zoo: ethnic prejudice; national prejudice; religious prejudice; class prejudice; individual prejudice; group prejudice; gender prejudice, and so on and so forth. Of course, just as one cannot deny the existence of stomach ache or feverishness and headaches, one cannot deny that such prejudices exist. But will it ever be possible to provide the correct remedy for them by simply categorising them like that?

I want to oppose this robotic categorisation of prejudices. All that comes of it is a commonsense stance against prejudice, known as an ‘unprejudiced’ view. Just as popular novels featuring goodies and baddies cannot help us to find things out about the real world, so a robotic opposition of prejudice on one hand and lack of prejudice on the other can only succeed in fostering new prejudices (this is how ‘prejudice against prejudice’ comes into being). In fact, the rationale of conservative thinking, that prime example of conceptual prejudice, consists largely of this kind of ‘prejudice against prejudice’.

I think it is necessary to analyse the process by which prejudice is formed and thereby unearth its true essence. In the past, it was believed that hysterics were possessed by demons. (In fact, it has been found in some cases that hitting those suffering from hysteria with sticks can provide a temporary cure; hence the empirical explanation that you were able to dispel the demon if you hit whatever it had attached itself to.) The following generation believed that hysteria was a mild form of mental illness (labelled a psychogenic mental illness, as its organic cause could not be found). The predominant tendency in more recent thinking is to see hysteria less as an illness, and rather as just one of the phenomena of the human mind. We have finally begun to overcome the ‘goodies-and-baddies’ sort of dichotomised approach to the mental realm. (The success of psychoanalysis must not be overlooked; however, the theory of conditioning was necessary to prompt psychoanalysis to become more scientific.)

Now, as far as prejudice too is concerned too, we must treat it as one particular state of human cognition, and overcome the robotic opposition of ‘prejudiced’ views with ‘unprejudiced’ ones. The phenomenon of the Child of Excellent Health contest¹ provides an example of the most ridiculous pseudo-rational view of health; a similar kind of flaw exists also in our understanding of consciousness. I think the very illusion of a correct consciousness, or Consciousness of Excellent Health, helps perpetuate conservative theories of education, and keeps more progressive theories of education stuck in the mire of unsophisticated enlightenment ideas.

Like hysteria, prejudice is not an illness, but a state. We encounter a new situation, the correct interpretation of which is not within the bounds of our current understanding, and simply extend the boundaries of that understanding in an analogical fashion to assimilate the facts in question, thereby distorting them. This process is nothing more than the warping of a perfectly ordinary

¹ Translator’s note: The ‘Child of Excellent Health’ or ‘*Kenkou-yuryou-ji*’ was the title given to the winner of a nationwide competition held in Japan until 1978. The prize was awarded to children in possession of a fine physique and excellent health, as well as good academic results and a sunny disposition.

epistemological function, yet without it we would have no struggles and no collisions with new situations, and therefore no capacity to renew our understanding.

By this I do mean to propose that we normalise prejudice. If the warping in question is microscopic, or in those cases where it does not give rise to a collision with reality, nobody really uses the term 'prejudice'; it is a label which is first applied when these alterations to reality have accumulated sufficiently to become noticeable. In small doses these warpings are viewed as medicinal, but as soon as they grow, they are stuck with a label reading 'POISON' in big black letters. Prejudice certainly does contain a poisonous element.

However, we cannot leap from the presence of this component to assuming 'prejudice *ergo* poison'. The accumulation of these warpings generates energy which, on the one hand, produces horrendous conceptual stagnation and stereotyped understanding; on the other, it can also provide a driving force for a revolution in that understanding. One cannot sever an action from its reaction and force the two to exist separately.

In other words, the way to overcome prejudice is not thoughtlessly to denigrate it. What needs doing is rather to bring its true nature to light, grasping in a principled fashion the relationship it bears to lack of prejudice, and learning to control and put to effective use the energy resulting from the collisions it causes.

To take the example considered previously, we experience discomfort upon encountering snakes, creepy-crawlies and the like. This is for the simple reason that snakes have no legs, and creepy-crawlies have too many of them (and not due to vestigial memories from humanity's primitive period, as is commonly claimed by those who have given themselves over to popular reasoning). If something has no legs or too many legs, drawing analogies with human life becomes problematic. Humans cannot imagine or re-enact the daily life of a snake or a creepy-crawly as something happening to them personally. In other words, we cannot easily anthropomorphise these kinds of creatures, in the way that we do, say, dogs and horses; for this reason, our habitual reaction is that of emotional rejection. The snake-charmer, however, who has a grasp on the interior world of snakes, does not share this response. The entomologist's hair does not stand on end when he lays eyes on a creepy-crawly (where as I am rooted to the spot if I see one).

Of course we cannot call the fear and discomfort experienced in relation to snakes 'prejudice', but this is not for the reason that snakes are mere creatures, and not concepts or theories. If powdered snake was found to work wonders as a cure for flu, but parents' associations up and down the country started a movement opposing powdered snake on the ground that snakes are disgusting, then

this would clearly have to be called prejudice. The phobia of penicillin and aspirin prevalent currently (I too suffer slightly from this complaint) contains an element of that kind of prejudice. The true nature of prejudice is always a surprisingly emotional affair; recall that ethnic prejudice is commonly linked with the sense of smell. (The connection between the formation of emotions and the olfactory field is currently a matter of the utmost interest in contemporary psychology.)

Of course, prejudice has a kind of logic to it. However, this logic is nothing more than the crude club brandished by the emotions in order to protect themselves. The terrifying thing is not the club itself, but rather the internal impulse to brandish it. The *illuminati* think purely of the urge to take hold of the club, but what really needs taking hold of here is the emotional confusion lying within prejudice. The cure for ophidophobia is, first and foremost, being forced to become accustomed to snakes. To this end, it would be best to be placed into a cage of snakes against one's will. At the same time, it is necessary to equip oneself with a certain amount of biological knowledge in seeking to conquer the fear, just as it is necessary to do when striving for a painless childbirth. (We cannot ignore the results of the importation of foreign films into Japan after the war as an example of ethnic prejudice successfully minimised through the emotions. Emotional exposure is more effective as a method of dispelling prejudice than purely intellectual exposure. The educational effect of the films was produced less through the content itself than their nature as records. On this point, I think Soviet film theory is greatly mistaken.)

Prejudice is essentially the allergic reaction of our emotional stereotypes towards new understanding. I do not think that Japanese people possess an especially allergic temperament. Even if the closed nature of Japanese society prevents a complete escape from animism, and sustains many distortions in our understanding, I believe that if anything this makes our degree of prejudice lower. I wonder if it is permissible to call the thought-structure of the uncivilised, indigenous African people prejudiced. The Japanese are of course not uncivilised; but if we cannot call the thinking of primitive people prejudiced, then, by the same reasoning, neither can we apply the term to our own. To put the point another way, I feel that we Japanese have some intrinsic element that belongs to another dimension, rendering us ill-equipped to accustom ourselves fully to modern thought and emotions. The Nazis' xenophobic and anti-ethnic sentiments were prejudice in the truly modern sense of the word, something which can come about only subsequent to the establishment of a modern state, which is to say, after the feudalistic conglomerate has been rejected and overcome. This form of prejudice is clearly the obverse of humanism. Japanese xenophobia, on the other hand, was still largely tribal in nature, an artificial mosaic of tribal feelings, and so at bottom it proved surprisingly fragile, readily

crumbling to nothing after the war had ended. Such is the fragility of fake prejudice which has no clear target.

This judgement is, of course, a relative one. It is not as though the Japanese are entirely without prejudice, but I think it can at least be said that this prejudice is weak. Support for a conservative party in a farming village should not be taken to indicate support for a conservative political view, but must rather be seen as support for a lack of political views. Whether we choose to call this *pre-jud-iced* or *unpre-jud-iced*, there is surely very little *jud-gement* in the first place. In order to bring a degree of organisation to this judgement-free situation, the conservatives spread ‘prejudice against prejudice’, which is to say, the view that any kind of view is a form of prejudice. Even sensible members of the intelligentsia jump on the bandwagon, lending their support to this form of opportunistic belief.

The view that has been generally hitherto accepted by people in the know, namely that Europeans have little prejudice whilst Japanese people have much is, I think, a very typically Japanese misunderstanding of modern thinking. Europeans who are – indeed, who have to be – clearly conscious of an obverse are at once more violently opposed to prejudice, and at the same time more prejudiced. The energy generated by the presence of this obverse serves as the driving force for a more dynamic understanding. Japanese prejudice is tepid. If we were forced to characterise it, we would have to say that ‘prejudice against prejudice’ is the most typically Japanese form of prejudice. I feel that the true nature of prejudice is much like the Grom, a race appearing in Robert Sheckley’s science fiction story ‘Keep Your Shape’, who have no fixed form and can take on any shape.

Prejudice is a tendency that accompanies conscious activity, and it can adopt any form depending on the external conditions; hence politics inevitably seeks to organise it. Organised prejudice acquires defined tendencies, and also gains power. However, what we must fight against here is not prejudice itself, but rather the politics which stands behind it. Prejudice does not create politics; it is politics which gives a form to prejudice. The reason that the Grom invasion of Earth fails is that the Grom are bewitched by the diversity of life on Earth, and break away from the demands politics placed on them.

However, the Japanese tend to think about this rule backwards, being as they are in the thrall of ‘prejudice against prejudice’. Hence it is said that the incompetence of Japanese politicians stems from their prejudice. What that means is, politics has organised them into having this prejudice. And a prejudice whose target is not in evidence is very tricky to escape.

So, at the risk of seeming paradoxical, I would like to advocate instead a mentality which embraces prejudice. We must reject the ambiguous state of ‘prejudice against prejudice’, and, with the aim of making use of the energy brought about by the impact of prejudiced views against unprejudiced ones, steadily apply fertiliser and water to cultivate our prejudice. When prejudice grows, it becomes conscious of its own object. As long as it is not forced in a certain direction by politics, a fully-developed prejudiced view will certainly self-destruct and turn into an unprejudiced one. To seek the creation of energy ensuing from a collision with the object of one’s prejudice is a far more revolutionary approach than preaching in a strange *illuminati*-like fashion about ‘unprejudiced thinking’. Prejudice’s goodies-and-baddies outlook only encourages degeneration. After all, the most important thing is not that unprejudiced thought wins out, but the activation of our consciousness that occurs when prejudiced and unprejudiced thinking collide.

And to Put the Legs on the Legs of the Snake...

Since writing the above, the cure for fear of snakes which I proposed has been unwittingly rejected by Shunsuke Tsurumi. ‘The mother-in-law,’ he writes, ‘will continue to feel prejudice towards the wife so long as both are imprisoned in the same cage. Living separately, however, may grant both parties freedom from prejudice. Besides, on the East Coast of the United States, ethnic prejudice towards the Japanese is weak, whereas in California, where Japanese labourers were viewed by the white working class as rivals for jobs, it is strong.’ It must be admitted that there is a certain amount of truth in this. Yet I feel that to take this line is like saying that, rather than educating pregnant women about how to reduce the pain of childbirth, we should instead prevent them from giving birth. Furthermore, I also happen to know of some factual data which contradicts Mr. Tsurumi’s argument: research on black and white soldiers in the US Army found that, when black soldiers were placed in mixed units rather than formed into special black units, the prejudice felt by both black and white soldiers diminished, and their performance improved. So, then: which of us is correct? The sea is salty, but it doesn’t follow that everything that is salty is the sea... But no, comparisons which rely on metaphors are dangerous. The fact remains that I have no actual proof to offer. Are there any volunteers out there willing to participate in an experiment to refine our understanding of the theory of prejudice?