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PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

GIVING UP THE GHOST

STUDENTS of sociology are well aware that primitive man through his failure to understand causal relationships found himself committed to a battle with ghosts. His arrow had its indwelling spirit, which it was to his advantage to cajole into friendship. He had to walk warily all his days within the strict convention of taboos in order to shelter himself from the awful wrath of affronted spirits. He recognized that he could not escape them entirely, although he felt that he might, with good fortune, entrap or outwit them. With this intention he made a false exit in the wall of the death hut, to prevent a restless ghost in its homesick wanderings from finding the true door and returning through it, bringing consternation to the family circle it had left. For this purpose, too, were the cunning incantations of the medicine men, who were able by their skill to imprison mischievous ghosts in hollow tubes, or by a display of tempting foods lure them from the bodies of the sick men they were tormenting. Yet these were, at best, but devices, and primitive man felt himself largely the victim of the merciless whims of spirits, to whom he paid their toll of fear and sacrificial observance even when he could not hope to control or evade them.

The history of man's progress from primitive animism to the scientific enlightenment of our day has been marked by the surrender one after another of beliefs in the ghosts which thwarted his remote ancestors. This he has accomplished by the discovery in their places of definitely describable relationships between physical things, with the result that he no longer fears where he can manipulate. We do not to-day treat a sick man as one possessed, jumping upon his prostrate body and beating upon drums to free him from the evil spirit causing his pain. Instead of treating sickness as a spirit incarnate we have progressed to the point of treating it as a complex relationship in which some factors are abnormal. Thus most of us know the symptoms that indicate that we have a cold, but few of us are so primitive in our thinking as to regard the symptoms as indicative of the presence in our bodies of a mysterious something called a

cold, which is distinct from the sum of these symptoms. Even when language betrays us into saying that a cold affects one person in one way and another quite differently, we are not regarding the cold as an agency, much less as an agent, but are merely recognizing a certain flexibility in the character of the relationships which the word is used to cover.

In other fields of human attainment, we have not succeeded to the same degree in ridding ourselves of this formidable fallacy; only occasionally, however, do we recognize that we are unduly complacent in crediting ourselves with having outgrown the scholastic philosophy which attributed distinctive existence to Forces and Essences of all kinds. We find Spencer writing in his *First Principles*: "We come down, then, finally to Force as the ultimate of ultimates." Thus to Spencer, Force, when most strictly conceived, was as much a thing in its own right and in addition to its manifestations as the *Horror Vacui* was to scholastic thinkers.

The same scientifically agnostic attitude with its tendency to distinguish between the characteristics of phenomena and their unapproachable core of reality, to the disparagement of the former and the over-valuation of the latter, appears in Henry Adams's chapter in *The Education* entitled, "The Dynamo and the Virgin." In this chapter he takes the dynamo as typical of physical force and the Virgin as an example of spiritual force potent to lead men to build cathedrals, to create works of art, and to establish ritual. In comparing these two kingdoms of force, he says, "They are as different as a magnet is from gravitation, supposing one knew what a magnet was, or gravitation, or love." Now there is to-day a very considerable school of scientists, inspired in part by such men as the late Professor Mach, who would make answer to this statement, maintaining that we do know what a magnet is when we have managed to describe with scientific accuracy its structure and its functions. So, too, of gravitation; it is its manifestations. So, too, of love; it also is what it expresses itself to be.

To take an incident from my own experience: I remember, as a sophomore, stopping to question my professor of physics at the close of a series of lectures on light. My question, with all its unsuspected assumptions, was whether he could not tell me very simply what light is in itself, quite apart from its manifestations. With all his genius for teaching it is doubtful whether my professor guessed what new reaches of thought were opened to me by his answer. He replied, in effect, that description when full and accurate is explanation. No one could tell me in a word what light is, or disclose its essence, since to know a thing truly is the same as possessing a

wealth of information about it. It was a momentous day for me, for my world appeared suddenly in clearer perspective and, as has always happened with the coming of the dawn, the lurking ghosts fled.

But in spite of the multitude of ghosts that have been laid as men have realized that one abstract term after another such as sickness, gravity, force, life, or nature, can be understood only when resolved into the concrete relationships from which men manufactured it in the course of the years, there are still ghosts abroad which pass among us with scarcely a challenge.

In biology, the challenge has been given and the once useful ghost known as the Vital Principle, or Entelechy, is now struggling for the right to render biological laws indeterminate. Moreover, it looks like a losing struggle.

In political circles, another ghost powerful and, as many feel, sinister, that great superbeing, the State, has long defied challenge, enjoying an Olympian immunity based on what is in reality religious veneration. But to-day, as never before, men are scaling Olympus to see what manner of beings dwell there, and already men are returning from the adventure with reports such as the one on "Communal Ghosts and other Perils in Social Philosophy" (Morris R. Cohen, this JOURNAL, December 4, 1919). It is significant that the common man, as well as the specialist, feels a vital interest in this examination.

But when all the other ghosts shall have yielded place to the relationships, physical, biological, or social, which their presence obscured, there will still remain one ghost so firmly entrenched in countless ways that it will not come under general suspicion for many years. And that one ghost is mind. Few to-day, even among specialists, recognize that mind is like gravity, or like sickness, or like "vital principle," simply an abstract name for certain concrete, describable relationships.

Even among the psychologists, we find that in many cases this ghost enjoys a curious immunity—curious because, in hunting down other ghosts very like mind, psychologists have been proud to be in at the death. Few psychologists, indeed, would to-day think of writing of the Will or the Memory. Witness the cordiality with which they have united to criticize Bergson for apparently treating will as a psychic force or a sort of incalculable entity. *Élan vital*, they agree, is as true a ghost as ever confronted man, and is quite as irresponsible. With equal unanimity, writers of modern texts of psychology by portraying the concrete phases of voluntary activity make an effort to disabuse the student of the notion of the will as a unitary force. They teach, in brief, that will does not exist as a

thing apart from the various form of voluntary activity we experience. As an abstract term it is useful in simplifying language and becomes dangerous only when it imposes on thought as the name of an entity.

Arnold Bennett fell into this error by uncritically regarding the will as an agent in his essay called *The Human Machine*. He wrote that any one knows that "the will, forcing the brain to repeat the same action again and again, can modify the shape of his character as a sculptor the shape of damp clay." If Mr. Bennett grants this much personality to the will, and yet evidently distinguishes between it and character, and equally, also, between both and the owner of the brain, who likewise owns the will and the character, it would take more than the barking of the little dog of the nursery rhyme to ascertain who's who in each one of us.

This tendency on the part of psychologists to reinterpret will as a term to cover certain types of relationships, occurring within the wider relationship of behavior, is even more apparent in the reinterpretation of memory. In his book called *Life and Habit*, Samuel Butler exhibits the older and now discredited tendency to treat memory as so clearly a thing that it can be inherited quite as readily as bodily features, and, when so inherited, appears as instinct, or, as he elsewhere calls it, as unconscious memory. Here the ghost-rôle, which the so-called faculty of memory is called upon to play, assumes traditional shape. This inexplicable, ungovernable something, waiting behind the describable everyday self to insert its unforeseen prompting or veto, is on a par with "the familiar" to which a Shakespearian mob is so willing to credit unexpected eloquence or decision in a leader. But for the psychologist, it is more customary now to speak of memories instead of the Memory, and these memories are open to classification, observation, and experimentation quite as our other characteristics are. Nevertheless, even among the psychologists, who no longer speak of the Will, or the Memory there are many who still speak of the Mind, while among the majority of men, who have taken comparatively little thought concerning psychological and philosophical problems, few indeed could be found to admit that, like gravitation or sickness, mind may be merely a class name for certain types of relationships and not a designation for something in itself.

As long ago as 1904, William James formulated the problem under the title "Does Consciousness Exist?" That he did so was all the more remarkable since when he wrote his *Principles of Psychology* he had accepted as a working hypothesis the existence in each of us of a mind which acts upon our bodies in voluntary ac-

tivity and is in turn influenced by the fortunes of the body. He confessed later a growing distrust of this position and said that he finally suggested his doubts to his classes. In the later years of his life, as we know, he labored brilliantly to define mind as a certain type of relationship.

In the essay to which I have referred, he said that breadth moving outwards between the glottis and the nostrils—breath, which was ever the original of spirit—is, he was persuaded “the essence out of which philosophers have constructed the entity known to them as consciousness. That entity is fictitious, while thoughts in the concrete are fully real. But thoughts in the concrete are made of the same stuff as things are.”

Before one can enter with any confidence upon such a radical re-interpretation of mind as James proposed, he must be as thoroughly convinced as James was that the historical solutions of the mind-body problem are untenable.

It is impossible within the limits of this paper to discuss the claims of materialism to having explained the problem by the statement that mind is a form of energy, or of matter in motion, or yet of Berkeleyanism which proves that all reality is mind or a product of mind, and that matter is a fiction. Both evade the real problem and raise new difficulties. There still remain, however, those other historical solutions that have become our current common-sense attitudes, and each of which endeavors to fix the relationship between mind—the indwelling ghost—and body its instrument or, at least, its habitat.

Descartes can hardly be improved upon for a statement of interactionism, the first and simplest of these positions. He knew that our nerves transmit certain physical disturbances to our brains. It is of little moment for our purposes that he believed that the nerves were hollow tubes filled with “animal spirits,” but it is distinctly significant—for it is what common sense still believes—that he held that when stimulation reached a certain part of the brain, the pineal gland to be exact, which he considered the seat of the spiritual element, then the hitherto purely physical activity was changed into psychical activity. On the other hand, if it was a case of volition instead of sensation, the psychical being, which had its seat in the pineal gland, would tip the gland in such fashion as to direct the animal spirits in a certain course, whereupon the mechanism of the body provided for the completion of the intended act.

It is plain to see that such an account of the interaction of mind and body runs counter to the principle of the conservation of energy, and for this reason, as well as for other considerations equally ap-

parent, other interpretations of the relationship have been essayed. There is Huxley's attempt to conform to the principle of the conservation of energy while still recognizing body and mind as distinct. He held that the bodies, whether of men or of animals, are marvelous automata, but are not merely automata because consciousness accompanies their automatic behavior. This renders consciousness a spectator, a powerful ghost, but still a ghost dwelling in miraculous fashion within man.

Even Matthew Arnold, who differed so vigorously from Huxley on many points, seems in entire agreement with him in this regard. One has but to read "The Palladium" or "The Buried Life" to recognize the quality of sadness in Arnold's poetry arising from the sense of duality of selfhood, and the further conviction that the psychical part of our being is remote from the activities of our body. "We visit it by moments, ah, too rare!" It is hidden, buried, obscure. In verses entitled, "A Sonnet Written in Butler's Sermons," he protests against the analysis of man's life into affections, instincts, principles, powers, impulse, reason, freedom, and control, calling it "vain labor"—vain because "man's one nature," where none may see,

queenlike, sits alone,
Centered in a majestic unity.

Possibly one may object that Arnold was writing as a poet and not as a psychologist and that he would be the last to accept a strict interpretation of his words. That is quite possible. But the pity is that the reader of Arnold who has found in him so much that is sweetly reasonable and has learned to trust his critical ability will be unlikely to be on his guard against confused thinking, when in these poems he finds Arnold writing with all the sincerity of deep feeling. And it is, of course, through the poets, the novelists, the preachers, even more than through teachers and the philosophers themselves, that great traditions are established among the people.

But to return, equally, whether we hold with Descartes that mind directs the body, or with Huxley that it is merely a spectator, mind itself is inscrutable, and the attempt to analyze it is, as Arnold said, "vain labor." Why it must necessarily be so on Huxley's spectator-theory is immediately evident. Any phase of conduct which a psychologist might study could by no chance yield any data other than those throwing light on the automatic possibilities of the nervous machine. For consciousness is, by definition, something other than behavior, being merely an attendant of it. It can not, therefore, be manifested in conduct, except as by analogy, the turning of the wheel is manifested in the squeak which accompanies it. The same

criticism holds for the closely related theory of psycho-physical parallelism, according to which, as has been well said: "intelligence adds nothing to the situation except itself" (Bode: *Creative Intelligence*, p. 251). It takes a moment's consideration to see that a similar difficulty exists in Descartes's theory. What interactionism such as Descartes's says is, in effect, that the body in all its intricate organization does not suffice to account for the fitness of the organic responses to the complexities of the environment, and that another factor, namely mind, must account for that. Truly, yes, but granted that mind pulls the right strings in this puppet show of life, what is mind? How is it informed of the strings to pull? In what sense can it have purposes? Does it hunger, or does the body? The answer when it is granted, sweeps one far beyond the familiar limits of Descartes's neat dualism. It is that the ghost called mind, which dwells within us, has ways of knowing, and ranges of knowing which far surpass those limited revelations made in consciousness. We are told of a sub-conscious self, and of supra-intuitional faculties which indicate immeasurable differences between mind as we know it, faultily and incompletely, and mind as it is in itself, unlimited and one.

Such a conception of the self we find in Emerson's "Oversoul." It is a pantheistic conception built upon a belief in one supreme and unitary mind or spirit, which in some inexplicable way pours its thoughts through the channels of human brains. "Man is a stream whose source is hidden." "Always our being is descended into us, we know not whence." But it does not explain the mind we do know, to say that it is a fragment of a much greater mind which we can not possibly know. Mind is still ultimate, and so long as it is sharply distinguished from conduct it escapes all observation and description.

Before the supernaturalism of this conception the modern man is theoretically more helpless to mold his conduct or direct his own life than primitive man was to control the ghosts which tenanted his world. Already as the implications of the historical positions have come home to men scientifically interested in this problem, they have repeated James's question, whether consciousness as such does exist. Having once been bold enough to deprive mind of the traditional privilege accorded ghosts, namely to refuse to submit to questioning, they were in a position to discover not only the immemorial fallacy of the old conception, but clues, also, to a scientific understanding of the mind.

In the middle of the last century, Comte announced what he called the law of the three stages; he believed there was a law of

progression in men's thinking, whereby, outgrowing both supernatural and metaphysical modes of explanation, man would at last come to the positive or descriptive mode. Comte observed, moreover, that if we were to make a cross-section of any period we would find all three stages of explanation employed as standards at the same time since wherever a positive procedure is difficult, because of the complexity of the subject, or prejudice, or emotion on the part of the thinkers, we might expect to find relative retardation.

The analysis of mind presents precisely such difficulties, but now, at last, men are beginning to say that this most stubborn of ghosts must make room for what is valuable—a description of consciousness as a unique relationship which may maintain on occasion between a living organism and its world.

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A GLIMPSE INTO MYSTICISM AND THE FAITH STATE

THERE have always been mystics and always will be mystics, according to Bertrand Russell in his essay on "Mysticism and Logic," and their experiences play a part in both religion and philosophy.

Now the ordinary man will ask, what is a mystic and how can he be accounted for? The mystics themselves claim that they exercise a mysterious faculty of the mind, common to all men to be sure, but not ordinarily used, at least not in the practical affairs of every-day life. Such an assertion is not only a challenge to one's scientific curiosity but also to one's desire to reach these rich and deep experiences of life. Certain modern philosophers, notably James, Royce, Eucken, and Bergson assign a very high place to the mystical state of knowing, or intuition, as furnishing new and valuable truths in philosophy, while the mystical faith state supplies the groundwork of all religion. James says, "The truth of truths might come in an affirmative form," while this paragraph from Dodson sets forth the view of Bergson.

The implication is that so far as we do know what anything is, what we are, what life is in us and in the universe, what God is, we know it through insight and not through reasoning. The philosophical view of the world would be that of the man in whom both of these complementary powers of the mental life were well developed. His intellect would look out and ask questions about the material world, questions which the intellect, using scientific methods, can answer. The same intellect would also look in and ask questions about the heart of life, both of self and of God, and instinct, developed into intuition, would give a satisfying reply.¹

¹ Dodson, *Bergson and The Modern Spirit*, p. 130.