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The Evangelical Quarterly

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PSYCHICAL RESEARCH AND SURVIVAL : AN EXAMINATION OF DR. BROAD'S COMPOUND THEORY

THE "Compound theory" invented by Dr. C. D. Broad with a view to explaining the results of psychical research without recourse to spiritualist doctrine, appears to be gaining an increasing number of adherents. Curiously enough, even the rationalists, who until now have been the first to explain away such things as trickery and fraud, are beginning to take the theory seriously.¹ For these reasons it may be as well to subject the evidence on which Dr. Broad bases his theory to a critical analysis.

The truth of a proposition is tested by means of a standard which is called "probability". This is divisible into at least two and possibly three parts. There may be (1) an *objective* probability, due to some element of indeterminacy in the physical realm or in a foreign mind; there may be (2) a logical or *intrinsic* probability due to the form of the proposition itself, and there will certainly be (3) a *personal* probability, which is simply a measure of how like or unlike the proposition is to those propositions already present in a given mind.

Consideration shows that the grounds for a belief in any one of the main hypotheses which can be put forward to explain occultism, cannot theoretically be affected by objective probabilities, so that only two relevant types of probability remain for discussion.

But these two types are by no means as indistinguishable in practice as they appear to be in theory. To deal with the theory first, a proposition pq which involves other propositions p and q should have a lower personal probability than either p or q

¹ C. E. M. Joad advocated it in November 1933, speaking at an R.P.A. meeting at Conway Hall. The lecture is favourably reported in *The Literary Guide*, 1934, p. 28 (January).

separately. Such a proposition is derivative in nature and if the assumptions which p and q involve separately are combined in some predictable way, a view which an emergent evolutionist ought not to hold, pq may certainly have a lowered probability. Yet in practice it is doubtful if this is always, or even usually, the case.¹

Further, it so happens that a proposition can be divided into constituent propositions in more than one way, and if we are anxious to make a given proposition look absurd there will be a chance to choose which way would best suit the situation. In the case of occultism this artifice has been cleverly performed by Dr. Broad² in the following way.

The possible explanations which may be put forward to deal with the facts of psychical research can be divided into :

1. Extended telepathy.
2. Spirits who impersonate dead people.
3. Dead people.

Now Dr. Broad argues that the second proposition has the least intrinsic probability since it postulates the existence of minds of whose existence we have no independent evidence, whereas the third, spiritualistic, hypothesis only postulates the continued existence of that which was once known to exist³; and the telepathic view also assumes the known, even if it ascribes to it hitherto unknown powers. In his view, therefore, there are good grounds from the start against the theory of impersonation.

It is, however, obvious that this is not the only way of dividing up the propositions. If, for the moment, telepathy be ignored, an apparently equally straight-forward method would be to take a spirit hypothesis as basic. In this case the spiritualistic theory could only be maintained by holding the two derivative propositions, (1) that the phenomena are to be ascribed to discarnate spirits, and (2) that these spirits are to be identified with the spirits of the dead. On Dr. Broad's view a proposition which involved belief in both of these constituent propositions ought to be less probable than either constituent proposition itself, and therefore the theory that spirits impersonate

¹ The assumptions involved in p and q separately may not be recognized as akin to those already held, but the combined assumption may be recognized as introducing nothing new.

² *Mind and its Place in Nature*, 1925, p. 516.

³ This may be a mind, or as Dr. Broad believes, a "psychic factor" or part of a mind.

the dead has a higher intrinsic probability than one which assumes that the dead are present. In brief, the argument about intrinsic probability can be used to point to any fore-ordained conclusion, and the actual conclusion to which it will point may be no more than a reflection of pure personal probability.

The question of personal probability remains. In the present connection the probability of attributing psychic phenomena to discarnate minds (or parts of minds) will depend on whether we have any evidence for the existence of such entities outside the sphere of the phenomena under consideration. Obviously this raises the whole question of Deism, and at the risk of inaccuracy, owing to the extremely condensed treatment necessary, it will be advisable to say something on this subject.

The apparent purposiveness seen in the organic world suggests to many that some Mind was responsible for its formation, although others have put all down to time and chance. For a long time it was considered that those two views were mutually exclusive, but the excesses of Paleyism, which did not stop at arguing that bugs were designed by God to wake men up in the morning, together with the callousness of materialism which destroyed all that the human heart counts dear, led people to seek for some *via media*. This they are supposed to have found in the doctrine known as *emergence*, a doctrine which, in the absence of all evidence, maintains that matter tends to fall into organisms whose properties are non-predictable. It thus avoids what Dr. Broad calls a "complex Deistic theory" by assigning the properties of God to matter, and it affects to leave the question of Deism open. By treating the problem in this way, Dr. Broad is able to take as a premise the dictum that the human mind is the greatest mind of which he has any knowledge,¹ and this being so, the idea of a discarnate mind is foreign to his mind. Naturally, therefore, the suggestion that such minds exist is one which for him has a very low personal probability. It should, however, have a very reasonable probability for one who believed in a God Who is other than a philosophic abstraction, even though he believed in the doctrine of emergence as well.

The next problem is to discuss the actual results of psychical research in the light of these considerations. Dr. Broad holds that there are two lines of evidence which indicate that an enhanced telepathic power is not sufficient to embrace all the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

facts. In the first place alleged communications appear to come more often from the dead than from the living, which seems unlikely on a telepathic view although the desires of mediums themselves might cause the result ; and in the second place the evidence furnished by Dr. R. Hodgson seems sound. Hodgson argued that on the spiritistic hypothesis, a spirit S having once established communication with a medium M in the presence of a sitter X, ought to produce successful communications independently of X, whereas on the telepathic view the success should depend on the relation existing between X and M, so that with a given M some sitters would get good and some bad results, while a change in X should make no difference. In point of fact, Dr. Hodgson's great experience convinced him that the telepathic theory did not fit the empirical results. The success of the communications depended upon the alleged individuality of S and were little influenced by X. Dr. Broad does not consider the alleged cases of cross correspondence convincing, and, further, he does not discuss the evidence for telekinesis and materialization, which phenomena would appear to furnish the strongest evidence against the sufficiency of purely telepathic interpretations.

If, then, a purely telepathic explanation is discarded it becomes of great importance to understand the relation between body and mind. At the level of common sense Dr. Broad shows that there are no good grounds, philosophical or scientific, for abandoning the naively realistic view of two-sided interaction.¹ He believes, however, that ignoring all psychic evidence there is a very slight preponderance of evidence for epiphenomenalism which is suggested, though not required by a study of the normal.

But a study of the abnormal leads him to believe that memories can persist after death, and this would be inconsistent with such a view. He is led therefore to postulate two types of relationship which can exist between mind and body. The first is the *Instrumentalist theory*, in which mind is a kind of ghost which sits in the brain and controls action, perhaps by regulating inhibitions at the synapses. He discards this view on two grounds : in the first case certain local injuries to the brain may cause complete inability to remember past events, or in other words they curtail the power of introspection which would seem to be a characteristic of mind. In the second place,

¹ *Ibid.*, Ch. 3.

physical injuries, diseases (and he might have added, certain drugs) sometimes change moral character. If then morality is situated in the ghost part of man it would seem as though a man's actual behaviour is no guide to his real morality. Indeed, a man of the purest ethical standards might find that "the change in his brain compels him to express his cheerfulness by scowling and his benevolence by attacking other people with carving-knives", while life-long philanthropists might be "inwardly boiling with malice which some peculiar kink in their brains and nervous systems compels them to express by pensioning their poor relatives and giving pennies to crossing-sweepers"¹.

Owing to these difficulties Dr. Broad decides in favour of another view which he calls the *Compound theory*. He supposes that mind is not merely a ghost which may or may not live in a brain, but that it is a compound of a brain and a hypothetical entity which resembles a somewhat eviscerated ghost. He terms this new entity a *psychic factor* and he endows it with the property of carrying mnemonic (memory) factors but not with the power of introspection or experience of any kind.

The air is populated with these pseudo-beings which Dr. Broad considers are at the beck and call of mediums. The experiences of mediums, however, if they are to be taken at their face value at all, strongly indicate that the aetherial denizens ought to be endowed with the power of choice as well as with that of retaining mnemonic factors.

A *control* often professes to communicate with spirits (or psychic factors) and usually speaks of them as coming and going at their pleasure. These communicators do not inhabit the medium's minds as does the control. On the surface, therefore, it appears as though an incarnate psychic factor (or *mindkin*, as Dr. Broad terms it) communicates with discarnate psychic factors and finds that they have the power to think. It is of course *possible* that mindkins have a habit of deceiving people like this, and Dr. Broad's view would necessitate holding this opinion, but if that were so it is hard to see why Dr. Broad objects as strongly as he does to the Impersonation theory. His own view would seem to suggest it rather than otherwise. But perhaps it would be unwise to look into the theory too closely just yet, for fear the psychic factors should turn out to be minds disguising themselves.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 535.

The grounds on which the Compound theory was accepted are worth examination. The first objection, that destruction of parts of the mind destroys the power to introspect memory, is certainly difficult for the Instrumentalist to answer, but it fits the Compound theory little better. If the power to remember things is dependent on the presence of both psychic factor and brain it would certainly follow that alleged communicators who were not playing the rôle of controls would have no memories to communicate, yet experience has shown that the communicators do communicate. If the argument argues anything it argues epiphenomenalism, not the Compound theory. In the second place the moral influences of heredity and environment have been common knowledge among Christians from time immemorial. They are special instances of the fact that matter influences mind, and the Christian religion maintains that owing to this factor man is not able to judge his fellow men and judgment must be left to God. It is not transparently clear that this view is absurd.

Another point Dr. Broad adduces in favour of the Compound theory is that communicators always give nonsensical accounts of the life beyond, whereas their memories of earth are very occasionally sane. This, he thinks, supports the view that actually they have no life beyond at all, and merely invent one on the spur of the moment, when a mindkin is formed in the medium's brain. Such observations, however, fit in well with all the theories except the spiritualist one and they can hardly be urged in support of the Compound theory. With slight reservations the same remark applies to the only other argument he uses, namely that the intelligence of the dead is so much less than when they lived, a fact which he believes is due to a change in one constituent of the original mind.

There are then three possibilities about the inhabitants or pseudo-inhabitants of the void: They may be (*a*) impersonating spirits, (*b*) ghosts of dead men, or (*c*) psychic factors; and having examined the reasons which lead Dr. Broad to decide against the ghost theory, we may examine his criticisms of the Impersonation theory.

Apart from his clever dialectic about intrinsic probability Dr. Broad has only one objection to make. He thinks that if beings do exist who are wicked enough to impersonate dead people they must be "devils". Now by definition "devils"

must be creatures "morally much worse than the worst man".¹ He therefore explains at some length that the minds which seem to manifest themselves at séances are not as bad as this. Quite true, the spirits play heartless jokes, at least if they really *do* impersonate, but then so do undergraduates, and undergraduates are not devils. As for their general morality, he thinks that it is about that of the Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, who apparently are not devils either. He does not think that the horse-play at some séances even comes up to the level of the drunken orgies at Cambridge University, or to the scenes at some political meetings. In brief, if these spirits give a true indication of what hell is like it must be so astonishingly like a Welsh University that those who die at the latter institutions are not likely to note the difference. It is quite clear, he thinks, that the only real grounds for the devil theory are to be found (a) in the desires of the High Church parson for the welfare of his flock, and (b) even more to the point, his zeal for Holy Church which naturally makes him discern the hierarchy of hell in all rival institutions of whatsoever kind they be.

If, however, the minds that appear at séances are worth comparing with devils at all, it must be worth while discussing what kind of devils they ought to be compared with, and this is specially the case since most people have a conception of what devils ought to be like, which does not differ very much from the stories Mr. Milton spun about them. As an anonymous eighteenth century writer² put it :

Bad as he is, the Devil may be abused,
Be falsely charged, and causelessly accused,

and it is at least conceivable that his emissaries have suffered a like fate. To be serious, if the devil theory is to be considered fairly it will be more reasonable to compare the modern spirits with the demons of, say, the New Testament, than to appeal to that mixed feeling of revulsion and amusement which the average Westerner feels toward the devils of the demonologists. Since Dr. Broad selects the point of wickedness it may be worth discussing it. Suppose that demons *were* deceitful enough to impersonate the dead, would anyone suppose that they would show their true moral character with transparent honesty ?

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 517.

² *The Political History of the Devil : as well ancient and modern.* . . . Printed for T. Warner, 1726.

Very bad men always have some good points, but if devils are worse than all men they ought not to have any good points. Why, therefore, does Dr. Broad think they will exercise no deception with regard to their characters? In other words, is statistical evidence about the amount of obscene material produced in automatic writing likely to be very useful?

From this it seems clear that if the morality of the supposed spirits is to be gauged at all, it must be done indirectly. Now the real mark of wickedness is shown not in the fact that wicked deeds are always or even usually done, but in the loss of all consciousness that they are wicked. This is exactly the character that the New Testament ascribes to the demons: "having their conscience seared as with a hot iron" (1 Tim. iv. 2). The demons did not always blaspheme—they often cried out, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", while the python spirit in the Acts merely testified to the Apostolic Mission. In brief, the demons of the New Testament were very wicked things, but they disguised their wickedness in such a way that it was not always possible to discover the fact at once. Even among the Apostolic *charismata* there was a special gift for the discerning of spirits (1 Cor. xii. 10), so readily could the demon appear, not merely as an indifferently moral being, but as an angel of light.

Now it is a remarkable fact that the so-called spirits of the modern séance do show a lack of anything which can be called a conscience. It has been found repeatedly that spirits which have been talking in a "spiritually uplifting" manner will use diabolic language almost immediately afterwards. The following example, the accuracy of which was vouched for by Robert Govett,¹ appears to be typical of large numbers of cases. A young man was practically convinced that his grandmother, who had been a very saintly woman, was communicating with him through a medium. Govett told him to ask the communicator whether Jesus Christ had come in the flesh: the result was an instant torrent of blasphemy.

It is quite true that this has not always been the result of such questioning. At one of D. D. Home's séances²

¹ 1813-1901. Formerly Fellow of Worcester College, Oxford. Examples of the extraordinarily fickle morality shown by the minds responsible for psychical phenomena are given by H. W. Smith, *Religious Fanaticism*. 1928. Ed. by Ray Strachey. J. D. Raupert, *Dangers of Spiritualism*. D. M. Pantou, *Irvingism and the Gifts of the Holy Ghost*, etc.

² *Experiences in Spiritualism with D. D. Home*, by the Earl of Dunraven. 1924. p. 209.

the Earl of Dunraven was about to put a similar question. The question was known telepathically to Home, who said, "Ask them [the spirits] in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, if this is the work of God." The Earl repeated the words earnestly and lights shone to signify approval. Home said, "We are able to make it brighter and stronger because you asked solemnly and in the name of God."

Yet these immediate moral reversions are not uncommon, and very strongly suggest an impersonation which when unmasked has caused the spirit to become furious. It is exceedingly remarkable to observe how systematically this phenomenon has been ignored. It has become almost a part of spiritualist doctrine that the moral character of spirits is unchanging—every spiritualist realizes that many spirits are evil¹ but he always assumes that those who appear to be good are really so.

Then again the Impersonation theory is not based on negative evidence—there is direct evidence of impersonation and the fact must be admitted on any theory. A study of the Spirit "Sally" in the Sally-Beauchamp case investigated by Dr. Morton Prince² affords a good illustration of this. Dr. Prince believed that "Sally" was a part of the subconscious mind of Miss Beauchamp, and "Sally" although very accurately corresponding to a normal case of possession, played the part of one fairly well, though occasionally she called herself a spirit, and until the very end considered herself distinct from Miss Beauchamp. There can be little doubt that in another environment "Sally" would have played the part of a dead ancestor. There are also many cases in which spirits play the part of the Holy Spirit or of God. In such cases they do not always gain complete possession, but can use the lips and tongue ("speaking in tongues"), or hand ("automatic writing,"³) of a person while he still retains power over his other faculties. Examples of both of these occur in the Sally-Beauchamp case.

It appears then that whatever the distinct personalities are which cause the phenomena, they will masquerade as anything in order to be allowed to remain in an individual, and

¹ E.g. Oliver Lodge. *Phantom Walls*, 1929, p. 189. "The concurrent existence of hostile or evil influences is not denied."

² Morton Prince, *The Dissociation of a Personality*, 1906. In the whole of this account there does not seem to be a single case in which "Sally" spontaneously shows a knowledge of right and wrong.

in all cases they show an astonishing ability to impress people with their sincerity. For this reason no very great weight can be given to the only serious difficulty which many feel about the Impersonation theory, namely that the new personalities sometimes increase religious devotion. Everything goes to show that where the personality would not be allowed to stay unless it exercised this function, it will teach religion. In like manner when it retains people's interest by a perpetual show of childish humour it continues the display.

If this theory of impersonation is sound there should be methods of testing it. Now identification of mind is an exceedingly difficult matter, but the most obvious way of hiding true identity and lack of knowledge would be evasion and foolery. Suppose, for instance, that the original mind of a dead man became incarnate in a medium. It would be very unlikely that the man would wish to replace his original definite name by one of the childish names ("Feda", "Dr. Phinuit", "Walter", etc.) which controls take. Making allowance for the fact that transmission of thought would be influenced by the medium, it still remains hard to see why there should be such tremendous difficulties in the transmission of a sensible name if whole details of past events can be transmitted. On the Compound theory things are not better, and this theory would further involve the belief that "psychic factors" retain memories of earth but leave behind so obviously a spiritual faculty as conscience. On the other hand, the facts fit tolerably well with the Impersonation theory. It would be natural for minds to be reticent about giving proper names if they knew they would have to play the part of such people in future. It is not difficult to see why the controlling mind of the medium always calls itself by some noncommittal Christian name and merely gets into touch with the dead people who are named properly. In this way the controlling mind can bring in alleged dead people and dismiss them at leisure according to the knowledge of their lives which happens to be available at the moment.

In addition, the lines of evidence which Dr. Broad uses in support of his theory all fit the Impersonation theory equally well. The poor intellectual ability compared with the dead people simulated, the rubbish concerning the life beyond, which all has to be invented, the Hodgson evidence, and the fact that messages tend to come from the dead thereby increasing the demand for

more messages from the living, all receive an easy interpretation on the Impersonation theory. It is no exaggeration to say that the Impersonation theory embraces a far wider group of facts than any of its rivals.

If then the Impersonation theory can be accepted, there remains for consideration the nature of a discarnate mind.

In the first case it is clear that although mind does not normally manifest itself in the absence of brain, this is not the same thing as saying it does not exist. The conception of a mind without thought or conscious experience is a very difficult one, but it is even more difficult to imagine that our minds actually vanish each night and become re-created each morning. The fact is that the world seems to be full of inconceivables and it is better to accept those for which there is good evidence, than to look on everything with an air of cynicism or suspended judgment. Philosophical thought shows that the conception of a physical object is an exceedingly recondite one, while the conceptions of causality or of force are quite as difficult to grasp as that of devils.

Causality, especially, is not altogether unlike a spirit in this connection. It shows itself by regular sequence and by a spatio-temporal relation of "nearness", and yet nearly all admit that the real meaning of causality is something other than these. Two clocks side by side may strike the hours one after the other, yet the striking of the one does not cause that of the other. Sequence and "nearness" are not causality, but only signs of the presence of causality, and unreliable signs at that. Behind all there is something unintelligible, weird, something which thoughtless people speak of so often that they forget its mystery and think they understand. So with mind. It is only possible to suggest tests by which its presence can be discerned. Intelligent words, looks and acts indicate its presence but not with infallible accuracy. Madame Tussaud's figures deceived, and automatons of the future may do so increasingly. Mind is something real behind movement and talk, just as causality is something real behind regular sequence and "nearness". In neither case, perhaps, is there direct introspective awareness of the mystery—though if there is, direct awareness of other minds can be much better supported than direct awareness of causality. In the one case no one doubts that causality between two events can hold without observable regularity of

sequence¹; is there any valid reason why mind should be non-existent because the usual signs of its presence are wanting? It is senseless to condemn the last belief as a recrudescence of medieval superstition and yet think of the first as "scientific".

Again, the belief in the existence of physical objects is not unlike the belief in discarnate spirits. Philosophers are all agreed that if we say "I see a table" the epistemological object "table" is not identical with and (most agree) is not even a part of the ontological or physical object, though there may be a relation between the two. How then is it known that there is a physical object?—and, what is more, how is it to persist when we look elsewhere?

The belief seems to come transcendently in the first case, but it is justified later by reason when it is seen that this is the most reasonable postulate that can be made, in view of the constancy of the character of the objective constituents of our perceptual situations and the similarity of these constituents as between several individuals. Thus intuition and reason both demand a "real" table outside ourselves, and despite the utterly unintelligible nature of such a conceptual object, and the objections of consistent idealist philosophers, most people accept the notion.

Precisely similar considerations apply to these wandering minds which have been called demons. Since we have no direct knowledge of what a mind can be like when it cannot make its presence manifest through an organism, it is no more possible to picture it than it is to picture a physical object which is not related to the objective constituent of somebody's perceptual situation. But this is no evidence that a spirit is non-existent under such a condition—any more than the supposition that when no one hears a bell ringing the bell cannot exist. At best it only shows man's inability to say exactly what he means by the word "exist".

Similar considerations apply to Dr. Broad's first objection to the Instrumentalist theory. As a result of injury a mind may lose all power to introspect memories, but psychologic research on abnormal cases has shown that exactly the same thing happens when there is a division of personality. In such cases one part of the total self may have no memory of the other part, and yet

¹ An event A may be caused jointly by several other events, not all of which are discoverable. In this case A will often follow the other discovered events but the sequence may not be invariable.

the combined self is able to introspect the memories of the two. In like manner the normal individual is unable to remember events which occurred when under hypnosis, but in this case it is again known that the memories are not lost. Thus although brain injury appears to remove memory it may only be preventing or limiting the power of mind, and just as one part of a divided consciousness is oblivious of the other part, so the fact that memories are not introspected does not constitute any strong evidence for epiphenomenalism, and as previously shown it certainly does not support the Compound as against the Instrumental theory.

The idea of a spirit being able to manifest itself only in the presence of a highly specialized state of matter, is not one devoid of analogy in the physical world. Magnetic fields may only reveal their existence in presence of iron or nickel, and again, waves from a broadcasting station can only reveal their presence in space by means of an exceedingly specialized type of apparatus. There is no real difficulty in supposing that mind can show itself only in the presence of brain.

Certainly such analogies constitute no positive evidence, but such is not lacking. The fact is that minds which, apparently, are not parts of the medium's mind can come and go from the medium. The simplest explanation of this is that they "exist" between the periods when they are able to manifest their presence. There is no more need to invent a Compound theory about mind in such cases than there is to invent a similar theory in the case of the physical object. No one would dream of arguing that since the existence of a physical object was unintelligible unless someone was looking at it, therefore it did not exist in such periods, but that a pseudo-physical object existed instead which in some way could combine with the experience of being looked at, and form a real physical object. In other words, the Compound theory, in spite of its claim to simplicity, is unnecessarily complicated and it in no way meets the philosophical difficulties about non-incarnate mind. On the other hand, the Instrumentalist theory coupled with the Impersonation theory appears to afford a fairly satisfying view of the evidence afforded by psychology and the occult.

In conclusion, one thing seems plain. The appeal of the Compound theory lies largely in its modern phraseology. Had its nomenclature been taken from the medieval Church, or from

spiritualism where it rightly belongs, it would have appealed to few intelligent people who were not already spiritualists. And one may shrewdly suspect that the main objection to the Impersonation theory is that its language is old-fashioned.

R. E. D. CLARK.

St. John's College,
Cambridge.