AN EMPIRICAL APPROACH TO GHOSTS

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[Originally published by the First Congress of Africanists, Accra, 1962]

"If something which seems to me an error", wrote Jung, "shows itself to be more effective than a truth, then I must first follow up the error, for in it lie power and life which I lose if I hold to what appears to me true".

Now the idea, that witchcraft and ghosts have objective existence, not only seems to me an error. Indeed, in the sense that it is possible to demonstrate empirically that the ether is an unnecessary concept, I doubt whether we can rightly speak of the idea as an error. The empirical work simply has not been done. Rather, the idea offends certain fundamental assumptions, from which - although I have learnt to regard them as no more than assumptions - I find it impossible to escape. They are the fundamentally nominalist assumptions of modern science - the assumptions which have reduced to a mathematical equation the very modest 'as if a force' of Isaac Newton's presentation of gravity, and refuse to regard as anything more than a useful mental model all concepts which cannot be directly observed. At first sight, the psychological concept of the unconscious seems to challenge these assumptions. But even a man of Jung's apparently mystical temper admitted that 'the concept of the unconscious is simply an assumption for the sake of convenience. Just as an electron is a convenient peg on which to hang certain observable events on a photo-sensitive screen, so the concept of the unconscious is - in terms of any thorough-going contemporary scientific methodology - simply a statement that human behaviour cannot be described in terms of normal conscious experience, still less in the relatively simple terms of contemporary biology or physics.

Nevertheless, Field's published evidence from Ghana, and my own unrecorded evidence from East Africa, suggest that there is an appreciable - possibly, even an increasing - incidence of disease, which fails to yield to the techniques of scientific medicine, but is nevertheless cured - and apparently permanently cured - by priests and mediums and diviners who treat it on the assumption that witchcraft and ghosts have a real existence. In terms of the contemporary scientific mood, it is possible to say that belief in these things has real existence in the minds of men, and to recognise that, in any therapy, the belief must be taken seriously. 'Nothing', writes Jung again and again, 'is actual unless it acts'. But there is a deal of difference between recognising the actuality of a belief and accepting its validity; and, just as it is impossible to treat a neurosis in scientific man by speaking in terms of spirit-possession - impossible, indeed, to treat it at all unless he accepts the propriety of psycho-therapeutic techniques - so it is most unlikely that one who believes himself to be bewitched or possessed can be treated without an empathy which may go beyond the powers of the scientifically-trained doctor.

It may be that, in cultures where the mystical causation of disease is still a basic and largely uncriticised assumption - and with certain individuals in other cultures - no thorough-going therapy of diseases attributed to this cause is possible without its acceptance at least as a necessary therapeutic hypothesis. Even where the disease is of plainly organic origin, the first question to be answered is, often enough, "Who sent the illness?" It is unlikely that what scientific medicine would call the necessary psychological predisposition for organic cure can be achieved, unless the question is taken at its most unscientific face value and the necessary ritual fulfilled; unless, in fact, the hypothesis is made that the required pre-disposition lies not in the mind of the patient but in personal forces outside him.

In these circumstances, the mystical hypothesis 'works', while the scientific hypothesis does not do so. Nor, in these circumstances, can the scientific hypothesis be said to include the mystical, in the sense that the Theory of Relativity includes Newton's Law of Motion. In the latter case, there are no empirical facts which are not covered more adequately by Relativity Theory: and its predictive value is very much greater. In the former case, the empirical facts - the total syndrome - include certain symptoms - such as depression or anxiety or withdrawal from reality - common to both cultures and readily interpreted in terms of either hypothesis. But they include also, and as an integral part of the syndrome, either a readiness to accept therapy in terms of the unconscious or unquestioned belief in mystical causation. There is a third type of individual - probably to be found in both cultures - for whom the only adequate initial therapy is physical - by drugs, or convulsions, or surgery. But it would now generally be considered that, where such treatment is successful, it relieves emotional stress but does not alter the primary personality and thought-forms of the patient. The re-education, which is its essential completion, must be undertaken in terms of the patient's own culture. As an empiricist, I must admit the possibility that the whole process, including the 're-education', might eventually be accomplished by physical means. In that case, it would be necessary to regard both the psychological and the mystical hypotheses as special cases of a more general physical hypothesis. But it seems to me that the whole tendency of contemporary scientific thinking is away from the attempt to reduce Gestalten to their component parts; and the possibility that mystical thinking may be combined with acceptance of scientific techniques and psychological theory is shown by a letter to The Spectator, which suggested that the effect of Electric Convulsive Therapy may be to drive out the possessing devil and allow the patient's own psyche to assume control.

A closer analogy for the difference between the two - or perhaps the three - hypotheses is, in fact, the difference between the wave and particle theories of light. What is obviously the same fundamental phenomenon - light - behaves, in different circumstances, in ways which have to be described in terms of incompatible hypotheses. Contemporary science cannot resolve the incompatibility. It has to work with both. Neither is wholly adequate to the facts. But the assumption is that this is no more than a contemporary difficulty; that ultimately a comprehensive, reconciling, hypothesis will emerge.

My accent has been on the contemporary character of science, because, in a sense, it is fundamental to scientists that they are never so happy as with new empirical results which shatter old hypotheses. I am suggesting that our experience in Africa makes it necessary, for the time being, to accept both the scientific and the mystical hypotheses, however apparently incompatible as each covering, for its own particular culture, the same fundamental phenomenon of the ill-adjusted personality, whether the adjustment is conceived in terms of his own psyche or of psychic forces exterior to him. The advantage of the scientific hypothesis - if it is genuinely empirical, and not merely rational, in character - is that it includes the recognition of its own partial character and the possibility of radical modification in terms of experience. On the other hand, the mystical hypothesis must allow itself to be subject to empirical treatment. There is no reason why this should not happen, provided those, who a priori cannot accept it, do not spoil their whole case as empiricists by refusing to recognise the potential rationality of those who can. The anthropologists continually insist on the empirical element in traditional magic; and there is no reason to suppose that the spirits and less amenable to objective investigation than the subject matter of contemporary sociology and psychoanalysis.

Both Jung and Lienhardt have pointed out that the forces, which modern man interiorises and attributes to the unconscious (whether individual or collective), have in other cultures been exteriorised as personal forces acting on him from without. I hesitate to use the psychological terms, interject and project, partly because there is some confusion in the literature over their exact connotation: partly because both Jung and Piaget, comparing their psychological findings with the anthropological conclusions of Levy-Bruhl, speak of a primordial condition of participation mystique or indissociation, in which there is no distinction between interior and exterior, between subject and object, between the psychical and physical; and Fenichel speaks of 'the original objectless condition', both introjection and projection being 'attempts to reverse the separation of ego and non-ego'. Although there is dispute as to whether this condition ever exists without, at the same time, some primitive recognition there can be neither projection nor introjection. However important a part they play in psychological development, they must be regarded as secondary processes. If the exteriorisation, to which Lienhardt refers as a cultural phenomenon, can be related - and this cannot necessarily be assumed - to the psychology of the individual, it is likely to reflect more the original objectless condition than any later process of projection. Similarly, if Klein is right in supposing that securely established good object-relations depend on a proper balance of projection and introjection, interiorisation cannot easily be described in terms of introjection alone. It becomes necessary to speak, at least for the time being, simply in terms of the differentiation between subject and object, accompanied by a de-subjectification of the object, the subject's enhanced awareness of himself, and increased control over the object.

These are, I think, four separate processes - however closely they may be allied; and there seems to be a fifth, related, process in which, starting from a condition of complete irresponsibility - because he recognises no object to which he can respond - the subject,

having de-subjectified the object to the point where he cannot find even a God on whom to depend, takes on himself the whole responsibility for the universe. It is surely no accident that, in the same century as Shakespeare made Cassius say: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings". Descartes discovered that, apart from God and from man's thinking consciousness, the world was a machine and Francis Bacon wrote that knowledge is power. It was the century, also, in which the Puritans came into their own in England; and this clue must be followed up. But it is not clear that any of the processes are continuous in history. Descartes' position has been modified in both directions - towards a recognition that the subject is very much more than his rational consciousness and that the object cannot be interpreted in purely mechanical terms. In the process the subject was, in fact, first depersonalised, interpreted purely as an epiphenomenon of economic or chemical processes; and further advances in the subject's control of the material world have led not only to a loss of responsibility and possible depersonalisation (this time, no longer in thought but in practice), but to a new form of exteriorisation in spiritualism, astrology and flying-saucer cults.

There are certain questions which need to be asked; and I am only too deeply aware both of the inadequacy of any answers which can at present be given, and of the further questions to which they seem to lead. The first is whether it is possible, by a sociopsychological study, to suggest the conditions under which one type of thinking, rather than another, is likely to be dominant. Secondly, and arising directly from the first, is it possible that a new type of social structure of the future may encourage a type of thinking which has not yet emerged-so that scientific thinking would, as it were, become out of date? Thirdly, are there any criteria by which we can judge that one form of thinking - and presumably, therefore, the society (if social determinants are indeed effective) in which it flourishes - has any greater validity than the others? (It is, in fact, difficult to believe that, except in an eschatological sense, this is likely). And, finally, what is the relation, within the mystical-scientific (exteriorised-interiorised) brackets, of religious thinking, and particularly of monotheism? Is it, as psychologists at least would be inclined to say, simply a product of the mystical type, or has it an autonomy which validates it - no doubt with proper modifications - within all types? It is of the first of these questions only that the rest of this paper must attempt a brief consideration.

When I first, quite recently, dared to put on paper some thoughts on this subject, it seemed that it might be approached relatively simply through Piaget's study of child development. The confusion between subject and object is, perhaps, best illustrated by the child's belief that, because he is inside his own dream, the dream must be outside him or that when playing hide-and-seek he closes his eyes and cannot now be seen. Piaget distinguishes seventeen types of causality - ranging from the wholly personalist and magical to the mechanical and logical - which a child recognises at different stages of maturation to about the age of twelve. Each may grow almost imperceptibly from an earlier stage; and earlier stages may persist even after a later type of causality has become dominant in the child's mind. But they seem to fall into three main periods.

In the first period, the identity of subject and object is shown most clearly in 'magical' thinking; the belief that, while the trees stay still, the child by his walking makes the heavenly bodies move with him. The second period is characterised by a differentiation between himself and objects, but a persistence of subjective interpretation in supposing that they are made by men and are endowed with consciousness. These are the 'artificialist' and 'animist' interpretations; and they may be used either together or separately; the sun moves because its maker commands it or simply because it wants to do so. They change over into the 'dynamic' interpretation, in which the conscious subjectivism of objects changes into inherent 'forces' with a teleological character and necessary connection with the life of men.

At this stage, Piaget thinks, the omnipotence and omniscience, which a child originally attributes to his parents and gradually ascribes to men in general, he now transfers - having learnt the fallibility of men - to the 'God of whom he learns in religious instruction'. Animism is denied to objects and creativity to men. If there is any personality whatever outside man, it lies in the one God of adult religion. But the crisis of discovery - which Piaget observed between the ages of six and seven - may be so great that 'artificialism' of all sorts - a response which was originally wholly spontaneous and in no sense learnt - may be called in question. The child experiences the first stirrings of atheism. Whether or not the crisis reaches this point, the conception of causality becomes mechanical. Explanation is in terms of external, instead of inherent, forces; and the moral necessity, which the child originally saw in all movement, becomes logical necessity. The objective universe, at first wholly confused with the child's subjective experience, is first differentiated but spontaneously filled with a multitude of personal wills, and finally bereft - with the possible persistence of a transcendent God - of all subject character. The conscious, purposive, subject stands over against, wholly differentiated from, the physical object, which is potentially manipulable by human action and comprehensible by thought.

This ontogenetic picture is reminiscent of a hypothetical phylogenetic development from magic through the ancestor cult and animism to polytheism, monotheism and a positivism which may go even further than Piaget's children and ask whether even such concepts as 'necessity' and 'law' are too anthropocentric to be attributed to the objective universe. It is, therefore, tempting to consider whether the process of individual maturation, which he describes, in dependent on the cultural milieu in which it takes place. With this question in mind, Mead tried to provoke animistic responses from Manus children, whose adults have a particularly rich animistic culture. She was entirely unsuccessful, gave cultural reasons why, at this stage in their development, they should think mechanically and logically, and suggested that the possibility of both mystical and naturalistic thinking may be present from the beginning, to be evoked by the appropriate culturual environment. Piaget's interpretations have been questioned even for children from a culture similar to that of his experimental subjects. But whichever view is accepted, it is still necessary to ask why different forms of adult society support different forms of adult thinking; and it is possible to accept a hint from the Wilsons, that magical thinking gives way to scientific as the 'scale' of society increases.

The concept of scale is one to which it is impossible to do justice in this paper; and it has not been developed by the sociologists. Small kinship groups include political, economic, ritual, socialising and educational roles within the kin relationship. They involve highly personal - even if ritualised - relationships along with a strictly limited opportunity for experience and activity, and freedom from interference from the wider society. At the extreme other end of the scale, the emancipated westerner may have only vestigial relations with his parents and other kin, and belong to different groups for each of his major social roles. At the same time, he is open to experience reaching backwards thousands of years in history and outwards thousands of miles in space. He has almost unlimited choice at least of leisure activity and is free from the restrictions of the small self-contained group; but he is subordinate to the impersonal political arrangements of a state which increasingly interferes in all aspects of life, and to the hazards which may precipitate a nuclear war. Relationships tend to be defined impersonally in terms of roles. This is to describe, at the level of social relationships, the differentiation and depersonalisation which Piaget has observed in the child's intellectual appreciation of the physical world; and, assuming that the dominant social model affects (possibly in a reversible reaction) the intellectual, it is easy to understand how a large-scale society may favour a scientific, rather than a magical, view of causation It is, therefore, important to ask whether there is any correlation between the coming of the Scientific Revolution and social changes of the time. Both this is movement and the Reformation are historically correlated with the tremendous expansion of intellectual scale in the Renaissance, with the beginnings of geographical exploration of the world, the wide spread of commercial relationships throughout Europe, and the specialisation of function implicit even in the relatively small urban growth of the time. Raven has noted the close relationship between the two movements in the sixteenth century; and Merton has shown the close correlation between the rational-empiricist emphasis of the Puritans and the like interests of seventeenth-century scientists. His statistics for nineteenth-century Germany show that, relative to their weight in the general population, there were twice as many Protestants as Catholics attending scientific or technical schools, or elected to membership of learned scientific societies. There were also nearly fifteen times as many Jews; and his failure to discuss this figure is one example of the small contribution which sociologists, since Marx and Engels, have so far made to a discussion of the social determinants of the scientific attitude.

It may, in fact, be crucial to the whole arguments. For, although this tremendous relative preponderance may, at this point, be interpreted as the attempt of an oppressed group to establish itself in the wider society, there is a suspicion that the positive response to increase in scale forms part of their whole tradition. Despite Jung's assertion that the Hebrew prophets were of the introverted intuitive type, at lease from Amos to Jeremiah they insisted on setting the objective events of history against the subjective self--over-valuation of the Chosen People. Under their influence all dealings with the occult were rigorously repressed; and they refused to be identified with the dissociation techniques (interpreted, in exteriorising terms, as spirit-possession) of the traditional prophets. The Wilsons insist not only that religion is an essential aspect of every society, but that it must match in scale the other aspects of social development. It seems that, in their

advocacy of a God who was wholly other than man, who created the whole universe and governed all tribes, the prophets were recommending a large-scale religion which alone was adequate to the general increase in social scale required for national greatness. The cult of the spirits, witchcraft and the gods of rural Canaan represented a regression to a lesser differentiation, a greater subjectification, of the object, which obstructed political expansion; and the Jews' refusal to accept the large-scale political implications of absorption into the Roman Empire was part and parcel of their refusal of the large-scale religion to which Jesus tried to recall them. But I suggest that, despite - perhaps because of - the subsequent historic experiences of the Jews, the objective vision remains essential part of their social heritage and, unable to express itself in political forms, finds a natural outlet in scientific activity.

In the meantime, the initiative had passed to Christianity; and I suggest (subject to historical investigation) that, with its curious insistence on a universal God revealed in the objective particularly of an individual man, it was the only religion of a sufficiently large scale to meet the requirements of the Roman Empire - just as later, in the conversion of Europe, the substitution of Christianity for tribal religion went hand in hand with centralisation of tribal government and political association with the empire of Charlemagne; and as, a thousand year later, Buganda's relatively willing acceptance - against the pagan and isolationist tendencies of Kabaka Mwanga - of the wide-scale implications of British government was accompanied by wholesale acceptance of Christianity and the deliberate suppression, by the Ganda chiefs, of the old gods. There is also the suggestion that the Reformation - insisting on freedom from priestcraft, expanding the scale of historical experience to include the Hebrew and Greek originals of the bible, and opening up the large-scale implications of individual responsibility before God - provided just that increase in the scale of religion required to meet the increase of scale which was occurring in all other aspects of life. The persecution of witches matched the suppression of the occult by the Hebrew prophets.

Jung considered the Reformation to be 'the culminating point in the objectification of the idea of God', and it may be that a more thorough-going scientific attitude in a larger-scale society has to dispense with him altogether. But, as society has increased in scale, he has either been objectified out of existence (at the most 'an autonomous psychological complex' of supreme value) or, been re-subjectified as the particular possession of the sects which have rebelled against the depersonalisation of society as it increases in scale. Another consequence, has already been indicated, is a return to the occult, even if it is imagined in contemporary technological forms. There is, indeed, a great deal of technological skill but extraordinarily little genuinely scientific thinking. It is difficult, in terms of the evidence which I have been able to consider, to preset any clear-cut conclusions about the type of thinking which could reasonably be expected to be dominant in a particular social structure. It begins to look as if a much more detailed analysis of personality, and of society, is required before any clear correlations are likely to emerge. It begins to look, also, as though - whatever may be said of religious thinking - the genuine empiricist may have to allow the legitimacy of mystical, as well as scientific, thinking even in a technological age. Perhaps the only difference between one society and another is the form which it takes.