

is formally correct, but the influence attributed to the fixed stars savours of astrology, and is scientifically incredible.<sup>13</sup>

Whitehead wrote in the same vein:

It is difficult to take seriously the suggestion that these domestic phenomena on the earth are due to the influence of the fixed stars. I cannot persuade myself to believe that a little star in its twinkling turned round Foucault's pendulum in the Paris Exhibition of 1851.<sup>14</sup>

Thus even my ashtray is a holon, after all. It is not merely a shadow ashtray on an Eddington shadow desk; but in some way, for which neither Mach nor Einstein ventured to give a causal explanation, its inertial properties are connected with the whole mass of the universe around it. One might as well call it a Mirandola ashtray, remembering the passage quoted earlier on:

Firstly there is the unity in things whereby each thing is at one with itself, consists of itself, and coheres with itself. Secondly, there is the unity whereby one creature is united with the others, and all parts of the world constitute one world.<sup>15</sup>

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We have heard a whole chorus of Nobel Laureates in physics informing us that matter is dead, causality is dead, determinism is dead. If that is so, let us give them a decent burial, with a requiem of electronic music. It is time for us to draw the lessons from twentieth-century

post-mechanistic science, and to get out of the strait-jacket which nineteenth-century materialism imposed on our philosophical outlook. Paradoxically, had that outlook kept abreast with modern science itself, instead of lagging a century behind it, we would have been liberated from that strait-jacket long ago.

It has been said that science knows more and more about less and less. But that applies only to the fanning-out process of specialisation. One would be equally justified in saying that we know less and less about more and more. That applies to the complementary process of the unification of matter and energy, particle and waves into one conceptual river delta, majestically moving into an ocean of abstractions—for the more precise knowledge science acquired, the more elusive became the symbols it had to use. The hunting of the quark begins to resemble the mystic's quest for the cloud of unknowing. Science turns out to be the most glorious achievement of the human mind—and its most tantalising defeat. We have become a good deal cleverer since Pico della Mirandola, but not much wiser in knowing what it all means.

But once this is recognised, we might become more receptive to phenomena around us which a one-sided emphasis on physical science has made us ignore; might feel the draught that is blowing through the chinks of the causal edifice; pay more attention to confluent events; include the paranormal phenomena in our concept of normality; and realise that we have been living in the "Country of the Blind". The consequences of such a shift of awareness are unforeseeable, and one cannot help but sympathise with the considered statement by Professor H. H. Price that "psychical research is one of the most important branches of investigation which the human mind has undertaken";<sup>16</sup> that it seems likely "to throw entirely new light upon the nature of human personality and its position in the universe"; and that in time "it

may transform the whole intellectual outlook upon which our present civilisation is based".<sup>17</sup>

These are strong words coming from an Oxford Professor of Philosophy, but I do not think they overstate the case. What they imply is a plea to make parapsychology, and more generally the study of what I called "confluent events", academically respectable and attractive to students, as a career or as an optional subject. Once there are as many bright researchers engaged in this field as there are now in the study of rat-behaviour, a breakthrough may be in sight.

In science fiction it is taken for granted that telepathic communication and psychokinetic manipulation of matter will become commonplace in the not-too-distant future; and science fiction has proved to be an astonishingly reliable prophet. Another of its favourite assumptions is that intelligent beings on other planets in the universe have advanced mastery of these methods. It is equally possible, however, that in this particular field we are an under-privileged species—together with our other handicaps. The grand design of evolution towards higher forms of unity-in-variety does not exclude biological freaks, nor pathological developments. I do not think the universe is a charitable institution, but we have to live in it and make the best of it. The limitations of our biological equipment may condemn us to the role of Peeping Toms at the keyhole of eternity. But at least let us take the stuffing out of the keyhole, which blocks even our limited view.