

THREE THEORIES CONCERNING PRECOGNITION

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In her paper, Mrs. Kneale distinguished three types of theory:

1. That which treats precognition as involving direct knowledge of future events. This assumes that all events, future and past, are directly accessible to the mind, ordered in a fourth spatial dimension. Dunne's theory is an example.

2. That which treats precognition as involving only *indirect* knowledge (belief) as to future events, being due to unconscious inferences from premises, some of which are obtained by telepathy and clairvoyance.

3. That which attributes the fulfilment of precognitions to the activity of a temporary collective—(or group)—mind, involving the unconscious minds of others as well as the subject of the precognitive experience.

Mrs. Kneale held that Dunne's theory is unintelligible, involving a vicious infinite regress of dimensions and observers. Prof. Ducasse advocated a theory resembling the first stage of Dunne's regress. In it the observer is depicted as moving along a fourth dimension in which physical (but not psychical) events are ordered. Whether this commits one to an infinite regress was not discussed. Mrs. Kneale criticized Prof. Ducasse's theory as implying that psychical events come into being at the present time, though physical events do not, so that it would not account for precognition of psychical events.

The unconscious inference theory was criticized by several speakers as implausible since it postulates such a

wide range of extrasensory knowledge. This would have to be incredibly extensive in order to account for precognitive experiences fulfilled years later in respect to seemingly trivial details.

Several speakers discussed the implications of precognition concerning determinism. Dr. Eisenbud argued that we need not accept the dogma of many microphysicists that there is an indeterminacy *in rerum naturae*. Prof. Wenzl suggested that some future events are predetermined, while others (which depend on acts of free choice) are not; and that only the former can be precognized. In summing up, Mrs. Kneale agreed that men are free only in a sense which is compatible with determinism. But she also stated that precognition seems compatible with the kind of indeterminacy accepted by microphysicists, since these maintain that some future events are more probable than others. Precognition might thus involve unconscious inference as to the most probable alternative; an indeterminacy itself might explain the fact that some precognitions are not fulfilled.

The third theory was discussed at length. Dr. Bender argued that on this theory precognition would be explained away, for there would be no question of effects preceding their causes. Some evidences suggesting the existence of temporary collective minds were discussed, notably, the so-called "Split Agent" experiments, which Dr. Soal carried out with Mrs. Stewart (Soal and Bateman's *Modern Experiments in Telepathy*, 1954). Dr. Eisenbud argued that aggressive and destructive desires cannot be ignored in their possible role of creating "precognitions" as results of unconscious purposes. In summing up, Mrs. Kneale agreed, and added that she would be prepared to attribute to the group mind, not only powers to influence the bodily behavior of the persons forming the group, but also psychokinetic powers to influence the movements of other physical objects.