

From JOTT to Cosmic Control and the Normalization of the Paranormal: Does 'Just One of Those Things' Solve the Problem of Psi?

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JOTT, I have to concede, is not universally understood as a technical term, so, as it is the starting point to this argument, I will briefly summarize the field it covers, which are incidents usually brushed aside as 'Just One of Those Things'. JOTT can be characterised in general terms as things that inexplicably come and go, though more usually they go and may or may not come back, whether to their original location or somewhere else. More formally, JOTT signifies spatial discontinuities, and when these amount to displacement of articles, these incidents are 'jottles'.

A striking and blessedly simple example of a comeback jottle was reported to me by my houseguest within minutes of its occurrence. On the worktop of his rather primitive kitchenette, he kept two large matchboxes side by side, one containing unused matches and the other containing used matches. Wanting to light the gas ring on the mini-cooker he was puzzled to find only one matchbox; he picked it up to see if it contained new matches, but found that it contained the spent ones. He put it back, and then lit the gas by means that might have set the house on fire, but fortunately did not, and, having accomplished this, he saw that the second box was now back in its place, adjacent to the one he had just picked up, as if there was now no point in hiding when it was no longer needed.

A comeback jottle is frequently open to interpretation as a negative hallucination, the sort of self-hypnotic denial that is within the bounds of normal psychology. But what about this: one of our leading members kept, permanently, a red-covered telephone number book on the left side of his desk. Needing a number he was puzzled to find that the book was not in its place. He fetched a sheaf of A4- sized pages containing the contact details of SPR council members, placed it where the red book should have been, and used it to find the number he wanted. He then became aware of a change in the environment and saw that the red book was now back, sitting on top of the

A4 sheaf that he had just consulted, saying very clearly ‘You know I couldn’t have been here before’.

Then there is the walkabout jottle, the most common variety. Mrs P., a member of the Scottish SPR, washed some dishes in her very identifiable orange-coloured plastic bowl and put away some crockery. When she turned round the orange bowl had disappeared. When her husband returned from walking the dog, he helped her search the small kitchen, but the bowl was not found. She had to buy a new bowl, a red one this time.

A few weeks later, she wanted some seldom-used device, and to open the cupboard where it was kept she had to move a table that lived in front of it. She found the device wedged in so firmly that she could not prise it out. Her husband got it out and found that the article pressing against it was the orange bowl.

As for the flyaway, the third most common jottle, who has not had items that are suddenly not there? Raymond Bayliss heard a quite large paintbrush fall on a bare wooden floor with a clatter; it was never seen again.

These are just a few specimens of many jottle reports that I have received, enough in my book anyway to satisfy the open-minded inquirer that not every jottle-like incident can be attributed to absent mindedness, hallucination, or, in the final resort, to a dissociative personality. So my assumption is that JOTT is as real as other more widely reported and studied psycho-physical phenomena, such as poltergeist effects, telekinesis and materialization, for which the evidence is copious and robust.

All of these physical anomalies challenge what is perceived as normal causality, or put another way, causal normality, these two concepts being aligned in reflecting our logical expectations of outcome given sufficient knowledge of present conditions. All of these challenging phenomena point to a view of reality in which volition (a function of mind) affects the state of the material environment in which we are embedded.

JOTT goes further than other more familiar effects. If a milk bottle is thrown across the room it remains a milk bottle, a levitated table is still a table, and if a medium sprouts a third arm or materializes a head that floats around kissing the sitters (whether they like it or not) the hypothetical ectoplasm does not become part of the familiar world – it goes back to where it came from. But JOTT makes a fundamental alteration to the substance, not just the behaviour, of articles existing in the familiar world. This is a greater challenge.

To meet it, I am positing, first, that there are two sorts of causality: one, the rigorously sequential consensus causality that governs the material world by default; the other, a deviant causality, which is personal, local and time-limited. Consensus causality prevails almost universally, but can be modified by an act of deviance, and it is in fact the deviance from sequential causation that precipitates and defines a paranormal event. I shall contend that the immediate source of both forms of causality is the human mind, and probably

the minds of lesser organisms playing their part in keeping the perceived world in place.

It could follow from this that consensus causality is a system imposed by natural forces on the physical world, a world in which one thing inexorably causes the next thing to happen, and that our minds may override the system. This would certainly be a mind over matter situation, and mind over matter is indeed part of the argument, but in a different way.

I have to preface my central contentions by making a large assumption, which is that there is a universal mind in which all sentient creatures participate as clusters of cells forming unified centres of consciousness, all interconnected by degrees of telepathic resonance with others on the same 'wavelength'. I do not think that in proposing this as a core principle I have so far said anything new or inconceivable to people familiar with the findings of psychical research.

Taking it further, quite a lot further, I posit that the primary purpose of our telepathic circuits, to use the handy language of radio, is to receive instructions from the cosmic mind as to how to imagine and model the environment; and those instructions will always be to maintain consensus causality, to ensure that our environment is consistent, makes sense to us and can be controlled in a rational manner. I further posit that as human minds have become more powerful, the implementation of modelling our ever more complex environment has been increasingly delegated to subconscious human minds.

To complete the preliminary sketch, I see life-forms as dissociated fragments of the universal mind, the instructions rolling out from its autonomic system, which like ours continues to function when the conscious mind is effectively dormant, as is the case with a highly dissociated personality.

So when humans set out to disrupt causality, as by experimenting with physical mediumship, it is not a case of mind pitted directly against what you might loosely call the forces of nature; it is minds set on deviant causation, side-lining their duty to comply with the instructions emanating from the central control, instructions that other people not involved in the deviant behaviour will continue to observe. The effects of deviance are strictly local and they can briefly prevail against more remote signals upholding the norms. Both forms of reality construction are implemented by our subconscious minds.

As we know, when physical phenomena occur spontaneously it is not because someone has set out to disrupt causality. But as we also know, paranormal incidents are the products of subconscious minds, sometimes reflecting turbulence and anxiety, sometimes assisting the realisation of conscious wishes and at other times seeming to work against us, as if to teach us a lesson. Subconscious minds seem to have their own agenda.

The question of how minds can control physical forces has proved a big problem over the years. Speaking as an uninstructed dual-aspect monist, I

propose a purported solution to the problem, sufficient at least to support these proposals. I see the universal mind, which of course includes us and all around us, as composed of mindstuff, and mindstuff can exist in alternative states, like water and ice, the water state awake and the lumps of ice asleep.

Awake, it is mindful and alert; asleep, it is stuffy and inert. It is clear enough that the lumps of stuff, having no initiative of their own, are controlled by the free-flowing and joined-up mind. There are no grounds here for conflict between the mind and matter aspects of the unitary mindstuff. I can imagine little iotas of stressed-out mind very ready for a session of stuffish sleep. And awake or asleep, mindstuff remains mindstuff, just as we remain what we are, awake or asleep.

Our whole existence is riven with dualities, the most objective being positive and negative, their opposition being reflected in all walks of life, experience, perception and judgment – male and female, night and day, hot and cold, good and bad. Coming back to the JOTT, we have to ask, even assuming that the proposed mindstuff model in which watery mind and icy stuff share an identity, how do we make an existing article vanish from one place and re-appear in another place, or return to a place where it could not have been just before it was found there? The answer lies in another duality.

With some trepidation and apologies to those who know better, I cite the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics (as explained to the uninitiated in paperback books and television programmes) that matter exists in two forms, an actual particle form that it assumes when it is observed, and a potential vibrational form when it is ignored. Well, just so. The instructions from the cosmic control tell us what to maintain in particle form so as to have a consistent environment that allows us to function. If you are waiting for a train, you do not want to see a bus coming down the line.

Whether dematerialization and re-materialization really correlate with Copenhagen physics is not within my capacity to assert, but I am certainly positing something just like it – so that, if, for some reason, your subconscious decides to dematerialize the pen that you were writing with (perhaps it is time you stopped and had a meal or a rest), then the act of observation will be withheld and the pen will cease to be constituted. It is not just invisible. It is dematerialized.

Your subconscious does not like to leave loose ends hanging and will probably bring the article back, and the reconstitution will be in your present vicinity, regardless of where it was located when it dematerialized, because it is not the same object moving around from place to place. The orange bowl did not slide off the kitchen drainer while its owner had her back turned and thrust its waythrough a cupboard door. It ceased to be constituted where it was last observed and was re-constituted, based on its matrix in the past, by unconscious human volition in the place where it was found; and, whereas the earlier de-constitution was due to neglect of the instruction codes for maintaining sequential causality, the re-constitution is in effect a delayed response to a continuing instruction to make good the default.

Occasionally, things will go wrong and the article will re-materialize in the presence of someone else, who happens to pick up the instructions by some fluke analogous to a crossed wire on the telephone system, and the article will then figure as a less common jottle known as a windfall. Occasionally, things go wrong in another way, and a similar but slightly different article materializes in place of the one that went missing, constituting an even rarer trade-in jottle. Of all phenomena, JOTT is at once the most seemingly trivial and the most significantly inconsistent with simple realism.

This leads finally on to the relationship between consensus causal events and deviant ones. To anyone not conversant with psychical phenomena, it seems self-evident that sequential causality is a rigorous law of nature that cannot be overridden. The mighty empire of applied science is built on the principle that if you provide a specific cause it will be followed by a predictable event, and that the next time will be just like the last time, whatever the personality, temperament, mood and beliefs of the operator.

But we know that the paranormal is a fact of life and it skewers the idea that causality is a rigorous law. I suggest that it is a directive rather than a law, and directives are not always observed. My proposal is that the one basic law of nature is probability. The most probable thing to happen is nearly always rigorously causal; but where there is a probability curve there are occasional happenings at the extreme edges that are highly improbable, and these are when unconscious minds reject the causal directive and impose a deviant effect, whether with some degree of deliberation or when the person responsible is innocently oblivious of subconscious caprices.

If this is so, one would expect what we seem to get. A period of extraordinarily improbable statistical success will be followed by a much more substantial period of resolutely probable results, and a golden age of physical phenomena, such as we had for 100 years starting around 1850, has been followed by a period in which it is quite difficult to find someone who can perform telekinesis on a matchstick. When very unusual things do happen, they are things that have not been demonstrated before, such as the brief flowering of metal bending.

Of course, not every deviant effect or improbable event violates causality – it is only at the extremes that this can happen. But if probability is the basic law of nature, then the paranormal comes under the same curve as the normal. You might say that this normalizes the paranormal, but I actually think of it as paranormalizing the normal.

That concludes the case for unifying causal and seemingly noncausal events under one head, all being implemented by the forces of mind and taking effect within the margins of probability. In the interests of presenting an uninterrupted skeleton argument some greyish zones have been passed over as if they needed no further examination; some of those areas can be briefly touched on here.

Apart from the universal explainaway that everyone, myself necessarily included, who reports a jottle is mistaken, deluded or a fabricator (the ultimate

barrelscaper), there is the arguable possibility that some people who are apparently normal and fully functioning may have occasional and fleeting episodes when a rudimentary alter takes over their consciousness for seconds or minutes, hiding articles and replacing them so deftly that the unsuspecting primary personality has no sense of discontinuity. This could be debated extensively (elsewhere), and it must suffice here to say that many jottles could not plausibly be reconciled with this explanation (the jottling plastic bowl would be poor fit).

The ontological status of causality has been glided over: is it actual or a mere semblance? And does it matter? For the purposes of this thesis (and probably for most other purposes), the semblance, necessary for our coherent existence, is good enough for the actuality to be assumed.

A wide field is opened by the idea of instructions being delivered from a central control system to human minds. This concept reflects reports on what Myers called telepathic hypnotism and raises questions about the relationship between PK and telepathy;[1] for while the transmission of visions, ideas or emotions from one mind to another may be seen as sharing a friendly social call, the delivery of hypnotic commands, even when benignly motivated, sounds more like forcible entry. I would contend that all telepathy is due to a psychokinetic impingement on the receiving mind, whether the incoming 'signals' amount to the sympathetic fusion of mental content, or the conveyance of a compulsion to act. So what is usually classified as a purely mental phenomenon could be seen as psychokinetic activation from the initiator modifying the content of the receiver's mind, an interaction outside the conscious control of the receiver.

For the sake of clarification, I am making a distinction here between telepathy and clairvoyance, i.e., the retrocognitive perception of a past state of the environment, which does not involve a sender.[2]

This linkage of PK with telepathy is consistent with the observed fact that sensational séance-room effects nearly always manifest in a spiritualistic context. Phantom figures that hold (apparently) appropriate conversations with sitters presuppose a powerful blend of physical phenomena and telepathic mindsharing, and in cases where no humanoid figures are involved the medium has usually been heard engaging with 'spirit' communicators, whether or not the material spoken is interesting or relevant to sitters. Here we have supposedly telepathic activity linked with causal breakdown, supporting the idea that 'messages' occupying the telepathic receptors deflect attention from upholding the causal environment.

The anthropomorphic model of dissociated cosmic mind may seem fanciful (or worse), but speculation about the supposed nature of the supposed cosmic mind is outside the scope of research, and is tendered as an optional frame around a thesis otherwise based on evidence and its interpretation. ψ

NOTES

1. Frederic W.H. Myers, 'On Telepathic Hypnotism, and its Relation to Other Forms of Hypnotic Suggestion', *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 4 (1 886), pp. 1 27-1 88.

2. For a full argument on this topic see Mary Rose Barrington, Ian Stevenson and Zofia Weaver, *A World in a Grain of Sand* (Jefferson: Mcfarland, 2005); and also *Psi Researcher*, 1 7 (May 1 995), pp. 13-15.