

The Methodological Excellence of Spiritism

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1. Introduction

"Spiritism cannot be considered a serious critic unless one who has seen, studied and deepened everything with the patience and perseverance of a conscientious observer; that the subject knows as much as the most enlightened adept; that, therefore, he drew his knowledge elsewhere than in the novels of science; one who cannot be opposed to any fact that is unknown to him, no argument that he has not already considered and whose refutation he makes, not by mere denial, but by other more peremptory arguments; finally, one that can indicate, for the facts ascertained, a more logical cause than that pointed out by Spiritism. Such a critic is yet to appear."

Allan Kardec, *Le Livre des Médiuns*, § 14, n. 8. [note 1]

When we try to apply these criteria for the characterization of a legitimate critic of Spiritism to each one of those who have pretended to be it during the more than one hundred and twenty years that have passed since Allan Kardec enumerated them, we verify, easily and without possibility of error, that even today such a critic "is yet to appear," in a clear demonstration of the methodological excellence of Spiritism, of the solidity of its foundations, of its superiority in relation to other systems, doctrines, theories that have the same object of study in common, that is, the existence and nature of the spiritual element.

This thesis was so lucidly defended by Kardec himself in several of his works that we believe any subsequent arguments to be redundant. Our purpose here, therefore, will be solely to recall some of the aspects already considered by the Spiritist Doctrine Codifier, commenting on them within the context of certain difficulties encountered by some Spiritists when comparing Spiritism with alternative "systems."

It is not insignificant the number of individuals and institutions called spiritists engaged in the search for "news" that can, according to them, "update" the Doctrine, give it "scientific basis", "harmonize it with the conquests of Science". In this sense, they seek to highlight and provide coverage - including through spiritist journals, lecture cycles, etc. - to researchers of the so-called "psi sciences", notably those who hold academic degrees. We will try, within the limitations of space of an article, to show that such attitudes result from an unjustifiable inversion of values, harmful both to the Spiritist Movement and to the development of the Doctrine and human knowledge in general.

2. Spiritism is scientific

"Spiritism is a science that deals with the nature, origin and destiny of Spirits, as well as their relations with the corporal world."

Allan Kardec, Qu'est-ce que le Spiritisme, Preamble.

Evidently, the scientific status of a theory cannot be decided by the mere deliberation of defining itself as a "science". This attribute is inherent to the intrinsic nature of the theory, and not to the name given to it.

The task of determining which characteristics of a theory are necessary and sufficient to fit into the category of science falls to the sub-area of Philosophy entitled **Philosophy of Science**. This discipline, like other branches of knowledge, has been constantly evolving. In its specific case, essential progress occurred in the 20th century, and, more markedly, from the 1960s onwards. The works of several philosophers, including **Karl Popper, Willard Quine, Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend and Imre Lakatos**, showed serious problems in the conception of science that prevailed for centuries, and even today it is very common to find among the non-philosophers.

Understanding this "old" view of science, its various difficulties, the arguments advanced by these philosophers and the new conceptions they have proposed requires

specialized studies of many years, and therefore cannot be advanced within an article, however long it may be. . In previous work we had the opportunity to try to give a rough idea of these issues. We will try here to remember something of what was exposed there, in order to give substance to our present argument. [note 2]

Quite simply, we could say that at least since the emergence of modern science, around the 17th century, Science was believed to consist of the neutral cataloging of a large number of "facts", from which they would then result, in a "spontaneous" way , certain and infallible, the general laws that govern it; the gathering of such laws would then constitute a scientific theory.

As we mentioned, this "classic" view of science proved to be unsustainable. It was noticed that the description, search and classification of the facts necessarily involves theoretical assumptions of one type or another; that no theoretical law can logically and infallibly result from a set of facts, whatever it may be; that a scientific theory is not a simple jumble of laws, but is rather a complex dynamic structure, in which elements of different kinds participate, such as observational results, freely conceived hypotheses, rules for the future development of the theory, methodological decisions, fragments of other theories etc.

Imre Lakatos systematized the new ideas that emerged in the Philosophy of Science, proposing that scientific activity develops around what he called "scientific research program". [note 3] Such a research program consists, in simplified terms, of a "rigid nucleus" of basic theoretical hypotheses, supplemented by a "protective belt" of auxiliary hypotheses, which serves to connect and adjust the nucleus to the phenomena of which science treats. Each program is also associated with two "heuristics", one "negative", which is the methodological decision to keep the core hypotheses unchanged, and the other "positive", which is a set of suggestions or ideas on how to change or develop the protective belt so that the program can account for new phenomena and explain those already known in a more precise way. A research program is said to be "progressive" if it systematically leads to the discovery of new facts, which are explained by it; otherwise, it will be said "degenerating".

Taking the example of one of the most successful research programs in Physics, Newtonian Mechanics, we see that it has a rigid nucleus formed by the three Newtonian laws of motion and the law of universal gravitation, which the negative heuristic of the program recommends to be kept unchanged: eventual discrepancies with the experience must be eliminated through adjustments in the auxiliary hypotheses of the protective belt. This process occurred several times during the development of the

program, such as when, in the 19th century, it was found that theoretical predictions for the trajectory of the planet Uranus conflicted with data from astronomical observation; instead of imputing this deviation to the possible falsity of the laws of the rigid nucleus, it was assumed that there should be an unknown celestial body disturbing the planet's trajectory; later, the existence of this body, the planet Neptune, was actually observed. As in this episode, the conjunction of the negative and positive heuristics of the Newtonian program led to numerous developments: new optical theories, new devices and observation techniques, creation of new branches of mathematics, etc. Since the beginning of our century, however, the program has become degenerate, for various reasons that cannot be explained here, and has been replaced by the programs of Theories of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics.

Looking now at Spiritism, we see that it contains all the characteristics of a progressive research program, being, therefore, genuinely scientific, according to the Lakatosian criterion.

It has a rigid core formed by the principle of the existence of "supreme intelligence, the primary cause of all things", endowed with the supreme justice and goodness; by the law of cause and deed; for the immortality of living beings; for its unlimited evolution; by the existence of free will, after a certain evolutionary stage. From this nucleus it is possible, with the aid of logic ("reasoning") and auxiliary assumptions, to deduce ("explain") the infinity of phenomena referred to by Spiritism: mediumistic and psychic phenomena, the evolution of beings, their states psychological conditions, their condition after death, etc. All of these facts, analyzed extensively and objectively by Spiritism, support and sanction the body of its theoretical principles; the latter, in turn, concatenates, makes intelligible, explains those facts.

Allan Kardec realized, in admirable anticipation of the recent achievements of Philosophy of Science, the fundamental importance of this "symbiosis" between phenomenon and theory, and made extensive comments about it in several of his works. The opening three chapters of the first part of **The Mediums' Book**, for example, are a masterpiece of philosophical reasoning that, while aiming to elucidate a slightly different issue, contains valuable elements relevant to the subject we are analyzing. Let us begin with these considerations in Paragraph 19:

"It is a general belief that, to convince, it is enough to present facts. This, in fact, seems the most logical way. However, it shows the experience that is not always the best, since at each step people are met that the most obvious facts absolutely did not

convince. What should this be attributed to? That's what we're going to try to demonstrate."

In Paragraph 29 Kardec returns to the point:

"We can say that, for the majority of those who are not prepared by reasoning, material phenomena have almost no weight. The more extraordinary these phenomena are, the more they deviate from known laws, the greater opposition they encounter and this for a very simple reason: it is that we are all naturally doubting something that has no rational sanction. Each one considers it from his point of view and explains it in his own way [...]."

This "rational sanction" is that which comes from explaining the facts through theory. In Paragraph 34, after emphasizing the importance of the facts in the foundation of the theory, Kardec considers, on the other hand, that of ten novice people who attend a spiritist experimentation session "nine will leave without being convinced and some more incredulous than before, for the experiences did not correspond to what they expected."

Then Kardec continues:

"The reverse will happen with those who can understand the facts, through advance theoretical knowledge. For these people, theory is a means of verification, without anything surprising, not even failure, because they know in what conditions phenomena are produced and that they should not be asked for what they cannot give. Thus, therefore, the prior intelligence of the facts not only puts them in a position to perceive all anomalies, but also to apprehend any number of peculiarities, nuances, sometimes very delicate, that escape the ignorant observer."

Interesting considerations in this sense are also found in What is Spiritism. In the dialogue with the Critic (Chap. I, First Dialogue) Kardec ponders, in response to his request for permission to attend some experiences:

"And do you think this is enough for you to be able, ex professed, to speak of Spiritism? How could you understand these experiences and, even more, judge them, when you have not studied the principles on which they are based? How would you appreciate the result, satisfactory or not, of metallurgical tests, for example, not knowing metallurgy in depth?"

Further on, in the dialogue with the Skeptic (Chapter I, Second Dialogue, section "Elements of conviction") Kardec puts the question in explicit terms:

"There are two things in Spiritism: the experimental part of the manifestations and the philosophical doctrine. Now, I am visited every day by people who have yet to see and believe as firmly as I do, for the only study they have done on the philosophical side; for them the phenomenon of manifestations is accessory; the bottom is doctrine, science; they see it so big, so rational, that they find in it everything that can satisfy their inner aspirations, apart from the fact of the manifestations; from which they conclude that, assuming the manifestations did not exist, the doctrine would always be the one that best solves a multitude of problems considered insoluble. How many told me that these ideas were germ in their brain, although in a state of confusion. Spiritism came to coordinate them, to give them body, and it was like a ray of light for them. This explains the number of followers that the simple reading of The Spirits' Book produced. Do you believe that this number would be what it is today, if we had never passed the turning tables and speakers?"

The first sentence that we highlight reveals once more that Kardec located the scientific character of Spiritism in the "doctrine", in its "philosophical part", which, in the context of our analysis, must be understood as what we have been calling "theory". The facts themselves are not science.

Our second highlight shows that Kardec already understood the role of theory as giving "body", that is, cohesion, intelligibility, to the phenomena, which is the task that Lakatos attributes to the theoretical principles of the research program, notably those of its rigid nucleus.

In the course of the next sections, the thesis on the scientificity of Spiritism for which we have been arguing will indirectly receive further elements of proof.

3. "Spiritism is not the responsibility of Science"

The phrase that serves as the title for this section was taken from Item VII of the magnificent play "Introduction to the Study of the Spiritist Doctrine", which Kardec made appear as an introduction to The Spirits' Book. This item deals specifically with the relationship between the Spiritist Doctrine and Science, which should be understood

here as the set of ordinary, "official" sciences of the academies, such as Physics, Chemistry and Biology. [note 4]

Despite the clarity and argumentative strength with which Allan Kardec approached this subject, not only in this section of The Spirits 'Book, but also in other of his works, especially in What is Spiritism, The Mediums' Book and The Genesis, The Miracles and Predictions according to Spiritism, curiously, many misunderstandings are still present in their presentation, even by spiritists. Thus, once again we repeat that not adding anything to what the previous Codifier said, but only recalling its arguments. [note 5]

We will start by noting that Kardec's statement under consideration comes, in the text, preceded by the word therefore, which shows that, following the rule he invariably adopted, Kardec offered an argument to the assertion, which, given its importance, could not be postulated dogmatically.

This argument is found in the paragraph itself containing the statement under discussion:

"Ordinary sciences are based on the properties of matter, which can be freely experimented and manipulated; spiritist phenomena rest on the action of intelligences endowed with their own will and which prove to us at every moment that they are not subordinate to our whims. Observations cannot, therefore, be made in the same way; require special conditions and another starting point. To want to subject it to common investigative processes is to establish analogies that do not exist. Science, as such, is, therefore, as a science, incompetent to pronounce on the question of Spiritism: it does not have to be concerned with this and whatever its judgment, favorable or not, no weight can have any weight."

The simplicity of the argument is admirable: Spiritism and Science deal with different domains of phenomena: the first of those relating to the spiritual element, the second of those concerning the material element. Therefore, they have specific methods and distinct objectives, therefore, there is no room for reciprocal judgments.

Note that the fact that Spiritism is a science - which we tried to show in the previous section - cannot be confused with the false assumption that it belongs to the domain of Science (that is, Physics, Chemistry and Biology).

A little further on, Kardec emphasizes:

"We repeat once again that, if the facts we have alluded to had been reduced to the mechanical movement of bodies, the question of the physical cause of this phenomenon would fall within the domain of Science; however, since it is a manifestation that takes place with the exclusion of the laws of Humanity, it escapes the competence of material science, since it cannot express itself by figures or by mechanical force."

Studying different and complementary domains, "Spiritism and Science complement each other", as highlighted by Kardec in Paragraph 16 of Chapter I of Genesis.

Before proceeding, let us see how Kardec presents the argument under study in **What is Spiritism**. There, the matter is dealt with extensively. In the fifteenth response to the Critic (Chapter I, First Dialogue), Kardec once recalls that:

"Spiritist phenomena differ essentially from those of the exact sciences: they are not produced at will; we need to harvest them in passing; it is by observing a lot and for a long time that a lot of evidence is discovered that escapes at first sight, especially when one is not familiar with the conditions in which it can be found, and even more when one comes with the forewarned spirit."

And, in the following answer, he emphasizes:

"You cannot take a course in experimental Spiritism as you do in Physics or Chemistry, since you never master the spiritist phenomena at will, and the intelligences that are the agent often make you frustrated all of our predictions."

In the **dialogue with the Skeptic** (Chapter I, Second Dialogue, section "Opposition of Science") Kardec focuses on another aspect of the question, also already dealt with in the referred Item VII of the Introduction to The Spirits' Book. With the independence of Science and Spiritism established, it remains to be seen whether scientists would be more authorized than other people to comment on Spiritism. This question is still topical, since we see many spiritualists in the position in which Kardec places the skeptic of the dialogue: they are distressed to seek the support of scientists. "I fully admit," says the Skeptic, "that they are not infallible; but it is no less true that, by virtue of their knowledge, their opinion is worth something, and that, if it were on your side, it would give great weight to your system".

Kardec's reply comes, as always, leaked in common sense and logic:

"Agree, too, that no one can be a good judge of what is outside his competence.

If you want to build a house, would you entrust that work to a musician?

If you are sick, will I make you call an architect?

When you are grappling with a lawsuit, will you consult a dancer?

Finally, when it comes to theology, will anyone ask a chemist or astronomer for a solution?

No, each in his specialty.

The ordinary sciences rest on the properties of matter, which can be manipulated at will. The phenomena it produces have material forces as agents.

Those in Spiritism have, as agents, intelligences that have independence, free will and are not subject to our whims; that is why they escape our laboratory processes and our calculations, and since then, they are outside the realm of Science itself.

Science was wrong when it wanted to try the Spirits as it does with a voltaic battery; it was unsuccessful, as it should be, because it acted under the assumption of an analogy that does not exist; and then, without going any further, he concluded by denial, a reckless judgment that time is in charge of amending it daily, as it has done with so many others [...].

Scientific corporations should not, and should never, speak out on this issue; it is as far outside the limits of its domain as that of decreeing whether God exists or not; it is, therefore, a mistake to take them here as a judge."

Kardec showed that neither the study of Spiritism belongs to Science, nor are scientists in a privileged position to give their opinion on it. It went even further: given the frequent distortion that involvement with his specialty imposes on his way of appreciating things, his opinions may even be more subject to misunderstandings. In the referred item of **The Spirits' Book** Kardec considers:

"The one who became a specialist attaches all his ideas to the specialty he adopted. Take it out and you will always see it unreasonable, for wanting to submit everything to the same crucible: consequence of human weakness."

There is nothing to prevent, of course, that scientists are interested, as men, in Spiritism, and study and evaluate it in this condition. A little below the passage we just transcribed, Kardec pronounces itself in this sense:

"Spiritism is the result of a personal conviction, which scientists, as individuals, can acquire, an abstraction made from their quality as scientists [...].

When the spiritist beliefs have spread, when they are accepted by the human masses [...], with them it will happen with what has happened with all the new ideas that have been opposed: the scientists will surrender to the evidence. There they will arrive, individually, by the force of things. Until then, it will be untimely to divert them from their special jobs, to force them to deal with a strange subject, which is neither in their assignments nor in the program. In the meantime, those who, without a previous and in-depth subject matter, speak out in the negative and scoff at those who do not subscribe to the concept, forget that the same happened with most of the great discoveries that honor Humanity."

One last aspect is involved in the relationship between Spiritism and Science: the need for it not to be out of step with scientific progress.

The classic place where Kardec dealt with this point is Paragraph 55 of Chapter I of The Genesis. It begins by considering that "based on facts [the spiritist revelation] has to be, and cannot fail to be, essentially progressive". This essential character of Spiritism results from its genuinely scientific nature: although the core of its basic principles remains unchanged, complementations and adjustments in the auxiliary assumptions of the protective belt always put it in agreement with the new discoveries. This is what has been verified throughout the history of Spiritism. The fundamental doctrinal nucleus contained in The Spirits' Book was, in the balanced hands of Kardec himself, unfolded and expanded in the studies that resulted in the other works of the Codification. Nowadays, the vast mediumistic literature legitimately spiritist has expanded, for example, the reports about the spiritual world. And that, we repeat, without confronting the basic principles.

However, caution is needed in understanding the progressiveness of Spiritism.

First, it must occur according to the positive heuristic of the spiritist program itself, without resorting to foreign elements, wherever they come from, at the risk of losing its consistency.

Then, harmony with the achievements of Science should not be sought unrestrictedly and at any price, since it is, in its abstract propositions, constantly subject to mistakes and rectifications. Kardec saw this clearly, even though he lived before the great scientific revolutions of the beginning of our century. In the item of **The Spirits' Book** that we are dealing with, we find this excerpt:

"Since Science leaves the material observation of facts, to appreciate and explain them, the field is open to conjectures [...]. Do we not see every day the most opposed opinions being alternately advocated and rejected, now repelled as absurd errors, only to later be proclaimed as indisputable truths?"

In fact, it is interesting to note that if Kardec had not printed the spiritist program the independence and autonomy that it had given him, instead adjusting it, unrestrictedly, to the severe scientific theories of the time, he would have, as a consequence of the mentioned revolutions, collapsed irremediably.

Apparently, those who nowadays advocate the "adjustment to Science" thesis have not yet realized this fact, nor have they realized that in the referred paragraph of **The Genesis** Kardec made a vital caveat clear, when talking about this adjustment:

"Understanding with all branches of the social economy, to which he supports his own discoveries, [Spiritism] will always assimilate all progressive doctrines, of whatever order, provided that they have reached the state of practical truths and abandoned the domain of utopia , without which he would commit suicide."

Note that the "suicide" of Spiritism would come, according to Kardec, not only from its stagnation (an aspect that is always remembered), but also from its assimilation of doctrines that have not reached the state of "practical truths" (which in general goes unnoticed) , because it was implicit in the text).

It is now certain that there is no stable scientific principle, no "practical truth", that Spiritism has not either assimilated, or even anticipated, and therefore the itchiness of reform and updating of the Doctrine is unfounded.

4. The deficiencies of the so-called "psi sciences"

"All theories that intend to elucidate mediumistic phenomena, alien to the Spiritist Doctrine, sin by their insufficiency and falsehood."

Emmanuel

This statement by Emmanuel, which opens Chapter XIV of the first book he bequeathed to us through mediumship (Emmanuel, psychographed by Francisco Cândido Xavier.), More than fifty years ago, may, to some, seem too strong. However, just like everything the enlightened Spirit has told us, it follows from an impartial and rational analysis of the facts. The recent achievements of the Philosophy of Science, not yet achieved at that time, clearly demonstrate the correctness of this judgment. This is what we will try to briefly show in this section.

The first line of non-spiritist research into spiritist phenomena (animic and mediumistic) that came to constitute a "school" was **Metapsychic**, which developed in the first two decades of this century and culminated in the publication in Paris in 1922 of the classic *Traité de Métapsychique*, by Charles Richet. Soon after, this school gave way to Parapsychology, whose pioneer was the North American J. B. Rhine, who in 1937 published his *New Frontiers of the Mind*. Since then, under the inspiration of this discipline, several other lines of investigation of the so-called "**paranormal phenomenas**" have arisen and continue to emerge. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that they are almost as numerous as researchers, each with their own "system". For the sake of simplicity, here we will call psi sciences the set of such systems, even though, as we shall see, they are not genuine sciences.

Among the common features of these disciplines, we would highlight the claim to scientificity, the assumption that they adhere to the "scientific method", the use of quantitative methods and apparatus, a certain aversion to "theories" etc.

It so happens that at the time of the birth of **Parapsychology**, that is, in the 20s and 30s, Philosophy of Science was experiencing the height of **Logical Positivism**. This philosophical doctrine represented, so to speak, the supreme attempt to articulate the classical view of science, which we mentioned earlier. Despite the efforts of the greatest philosophers of the time, however, such a program failed in a spectacular and definitive way, given the arguments against it, mainly by the philosophers we cited in section 2 (Reformer, November 1988, pp. 328-331).

Despite this, such was the intensity of this philosophical movement, which exerted an unprecedented influence on scientists, which survived its failure, lasting until today, with dire consequences for Science.

Inevitably, Parapsychology, which was born at that time with pretensions to scientificity, sought to strictly follow the canons advocated by Logical Positivism for the characterization of a science. (This phenomenon also occurred with Sociology and

Psychology, who were also looking for scientificity. By the way, it is significant that Rhine and other pioneers in Parapsychology were psychologists.)

The consequence could not be otherwise: this new discipline carried with it, from its conception, the serious deficiencies of the logical-positivist view of science, adopting methods incompatible with the purposes for which it is proposed, pursuing an ideal of scientificity completely illusory. And behind her came the others, despite the praiseworthy good intentions of most of their profits.

To illustrate this situation, let us now consider some **concrete examples of the mistakes that these alleged sciences are making.**

a) Following the old "recipe", they try to accumulate facts about facts, without the aid of a theoretical ordering body. We saw above how innocuous and unscientific this procedure is, and how well Kardec understood this reality.

b) When explanations are given, they are fragmented, each fact being "explained" by an isolated hypothesis. In this way, even if we artificially group these hypotheses, we will only form an inconsistent whole, which violates Logic itself. Modern philosophy does not even consider genuine explanations to be "explanations" isolated from facts.

c) The explanations are, as a rule, even more fantastic than the facts they propose to explain. In the admirable refutations to the contradictors of Spiritism contained in several of his works, notably in *What is Spiritism* (Chapter I), *The Mediums' Book* (First Part, Chapter IV), *Heaven and Hell* (First Part) and *The Spirits' Book* (Introduction, Item XVI), Allan Kardec, with the sharpness of spirit that characterized him, already pointed out this type of problem. In the "False explanations of the phenomena" section of the first of these books, Kardec asks:

"How can they claim to account for spiritist phenomena [through the hallucination hypothesis] without being able to explain their explanation?"

And further on he adds:

"It is really curious to see the contradictors working on the search for causes a hundred times more extraordinary and difficult to understand than those presented by Spiritism."

Another type of pseudo-explanation commonly found is purely nominal explanations: they lack any substance, consisting solely of the use of eccentric phraseology in the description of the phenomena. Emmanuel utters a similar philosophical addiction in the paragraph that immediately follows what opens this section:

"In vain, we try to complicate the issue with elaborate terms, presenting the most absurd and absurd hypotheses [...]."

d) When "theories" are provided, they do not account for all the facts. Here, too, Kardec warned (**The Mediums' Book**, paragraph 42):

"What characterizes a true theory is being able to give a reason for everything. If, however, a single fact contradicts it, it is that it is false, incomplete, or too absolute."

e) Many relevant facts are simply not recognized. This can result from: i) preconceived ideas, as in the case of those that a priori deny the possibility of being's survival, and therefore do not investigate a vast number of phenomena related to it. (This problem reaches the verge of absurdity in the horror that some researchers have for mediums - exactly the most abundant source of phenomena available!); or ii) the lack of a theory to guide the search and analysis of the facts. We saw above with Kardec how far Spiritism is from incurring similar mistakes.

f) Use of inappropriate research techniques. The typical and most important case is the use of the "quantitative method". As is known, this method constitutes one of the greatest flags of Parapsychology and other "psi sciences", which they believe to be following the fortunate paths of Physics and Chemistry. Now, if the analysis of quantities undoubtedly plays an important (although not exclusive!) Role in these sciences, it does not follow that it must be equally fruitful in the study of a completely different order of phenomena. In fact, in this case, they are completely expendable (to say the least). It is even ridiculous to want to replace the thorough evidence provided by an intelligent demonstration (such as a letter that contains detailed information about episodes and unknown things) with measures of statistical deviation in playing card identification experiments, or the like. Not that the latter are irrelevant; but the evidence they can give is immensely weaker and more doubtful than that resulting from intelligent manifestations, and even from extraordinary physical effects produced by a powerful medium. (It seems that we are here in the position of a warrior who, having a modern cannon, prefers to use a rough slingshot ...)

This situation was, as always, perceived and fought by Allan Kardec, who not only repeatedly emphasized the crucial importance and superiority of mediumistic phenomena with intelligent effects, but also explicitly referred to the inadequacy of quantitative methods, as noted in the quotes that we did in section 3, especially in this section of **What is Spiritism** (we highlight):

"[Spiritist phenomena] have, as agents, intelligences that have independence, free will and are not subject to our whims; that's why they escape our laboratory processes and calculations [...]. Science was wrong when it wanted to try the Spirits, as it does with a voltaic battery; it was unsuccessful as it should be, because it acted under the assumption of an analogy that does not exist."

Also in the Item of **The Spirits' Book** that we saw analyzing Kardec alert (we highlight):

"[Spiritist manifestations] are beyond the competence of material science, since they cannot express themselves by numbers or by mechanical force."

g) Unnecessary and dangerous use of sophisticated devices. Despite the undeniable value in investigations of the matter, as shown by the remarkable advances in Physics and Chemistry, the need for devices in the study of spiritist phenomena was evidenced by the considerations outlined in the previous item. In addition, there are even risks in its use. First, such use can cover up profound methodological deficiencies, producing an illusory impression of rigor, of scientificity. Then, and more importantly, from an epistemological point of view (that is, from the theory of knowledge), observations through devices occupy a much lower level on the scale of reliability than those that can be achieved immediately. (Thus, one of the most widespread aspects of Epistemology even denies that theoretical entities that are not directly observable have "referents", that is, real counterparts.) The reason for this is simple: when using a device to make a certain observation, the result it will also presuppose the validity of the theories involved in the construction and operation of the apparatus, thus introducing more elements of uncertainty.

These epistemological considerations explain, by the way, the great **stability of the core of fundamental principles of Spiritism**, when compared to those of scientific theories, since they rest in extremely basic phenomena from an epistemic point of view, with the same degree of certainty, as, for example, the propositions that we now have a sheet of paper in front of us, that there is something written on it, that we are seated, etc. It mediates a vast conceptual distance between propositions of this type and, for

example, those about the structure of atoms, black holes, the mechanism of genetic mutations, etc.

h) Reference to obsolete scientific concepts and theories. Physics of this century introduced, as we have already said, radical changes in its theories, and consequently in our view of the world. Concepts that were part of Classical Physics, such as those of absolute space and time, particles, fields, etc., were either totally abandoned, or thoroughly revised, as they no longer serve the new theories, failing to account for the observed phenomena. Thus, it is unbelievable that there are researchers in the "psi sciences" trying to elaborate "theories" and "models" for the Spirit based on notions of particles and fields, and even more, with the pretension of being following Science! Here we see once again the lucidity of Kardec and the Spirits who helped him, by not linking the central principles of Spiritism to any of these notions. Rather, they based it on basic, "phenomenological" propositions, as philosophers say, precisely because they are stable.

i) Disregard for the past: each researcher in general resumes investigations from "nothing", as if others have not already made reliable findings. If balanced doubt represents prudence, when it becomes unrestricted and unthinking, coupled with presumption and pride, it makes knowledge unfeasible. If science had adopted such an attitude, it would not have left its prehistory.

j) Ignorance of the relevance of "moral" factors in the production of certain phenomena. Kardec was quick to recognize, in his studies, the sometimes crucial influences of factors linked to the harmony of thought of mediums, experimenters and assistants, the objectives they propose, their moral condition, etc. The subject is addressed, among other places, in Chapter XXI of **The Mediums' Book**, where Kardec emphasizes the "enormous influence of the medium on the nature of intelligent manifestations" (paragraph 233). This influence has also been illustrated and emphasized in the good mediumistic literature, which shows us in detail the complexity of the work of the Spirits in the production of phenomena. So, just to take one of the countless examples, let us remember the description that **André Luiz** gives in **Missionaries of the Light** (Chap. X) of the profound disturbance caused in the materialization works that he witnessed by the simple entry into the enclosure of an inwardly unbalanced man, and, then, by the uncontrolled thoughts of the meeting participants. Facing the surprise, Instructor **Alexandre** explains (we highlight):

"In these phenomena, André, the moral factors constitute decisive elements of organization. We are not dealing with mechanisms of less effort, but with sacred

manifestations of life, in which one cannot do without the superior elements and the vibratory attunement."

Emmanuel also addresses considerations of the same content in Chapter XIII of his already mentioned book **Emmanuel** (we highlight):

"There are not a few scholars who seek to investigate the domains of psychic science, in order to find the true side of life; however, if they often find only the failure of their expectations, the breakdown of their ideals, it is that they engage in risky studies without prior preparation to resolve such high issues, voluntarily erring with a spirit of criticism, often unjustified, since it is not son of accurate, profound reasoning. Success in studying such transcendental problems requires the use of moral factors, rarely encountered; hence the unproductiveness of enthusiasms and desires that can be ardent and sincere."

5. Spiritism is religious

"[...] is Spiritism, then, a religion? Yes, without a doubt, gentlemen: In the philosophical sense, Spiritism is a religion, and we honor ourselves, since it is the doctrine that establishes the bonds of fraternity and the communion of thoughts not in a simple convention, but on the most solid basis : the very laws of Nature.

Why then do we declare that Spiritism was not a religion? For the reason that there is only one word to express two different ideas, and that, according to the general opinion, the term religion is inseparable from the notion of worship, and evokes only an idea of form, with which Spiritism has no relation. If a religion had been proclaimed, the public would see only a new edition, or a variant, if we like, of the absolute principles in the matter of faith, a priestly caste with its procession of hierarchies, ceremonies and privileges; it would not distinguish it from the ideas of mysticism and from the mistakes against which one is often well instructed.

Having none of the characteristics of a religion, in the usual sense of the word, Spiritism could not and should not be decorated with a title about whose meaning there would inevitably be misunderstandings. This is why it calls itself simply a philosophical and moral doctrine."

Allan Kardec [note 6]

In the same way as there has been a lack of understanding about the scientific character of Spiritism and its relations with the sciences, its religious character and its relations with religions have also been a point of frequent confusion.

Just as **scientific Spiritism can be shown, although it is not included among the ordinary sciences**, by studying a diverse domain of phenomena, it can, as Kardec himself did, show that **Spiritism is religious, although it is not confused with ordinary religions**.

If, in establishing the first of these theses, we had to correctly identify which characteristics of a theory make it scientific, we must, to justify the second, establish adequate criteria for the classification of a doctrine in the religious sphere.

This task must begin with the etymological analysis of the word religion. It comes from the Latin religione, derived from religare, which naturally means "rewire", in which case it is understood that "rewiring" is from the creature to the Creator.

Here comes the first difference between Spiritism and ordinary religions.

These usually understand **God** as a supreme being, creator of everything that exists, but with notoriously anthropomorphic characteristics.

Spiritism, on the other hand, defines it as **"the supreme intelligence, the primary cause of all things"** (The Spirits' Book, Question n 1.), giving it attributes exclusively eternity, immutability, immateriality, uniqueness, omnipotence and sovereign justice and goodness (ibidem, Question 13), which obviously excludes any anthropomorphic character.

The second fundamental difference is in the way in which Spiritism understands that the **reconnection between the creature and God** can and should be promoted.

According to ordinary religions, it occurs through the adjustment of the creature to certain moral (ethical) rules and / or through the satisfaction of formal and external measures of various kinds, depending on the religion: baptism, confirmation, communion, confession; participation in cults, rituals, ceremonies; performing certain gestures; recitation of formulas and prayers; worship of diverse images and objects; promises, penances, fasts; carry the "marks of God" etc.

Spiritism, on the other hand, proposes that the reconnection of the creature to the Creator is done exclusively by adapting its conduct to certain moral precepts, the measures of an external nature being considered not only superfluous, but also totally discouraged and combated.

The third difference lies in what are the **moral rules in question**.

Spiritism takes them as only those proposed by Jesus, and which are summed up in the precept of love of neighbor.

On the other hand, ordinary religions may, depending on the case, include or not include evangelical norms, or partially include them, or add others, or change their original interpretation, etc.

Finally, a crucial difference arises in the **way in which these ethical rules are justified**.

Ordinary religions "justify" the moral norms they propose by appealing to the authority of this or that individual or institution; they are dogmas, therefore articles of faith to be accepted without examination.

Spiritism, on the other hand, bases the body of its ethical precepts on the knowledge it scientifically achieves of the consequences of human actions throughout the unlimited existence of beings, coupled with the teleological clause that everyone craves happiness. There is no place here for dogmas and impositions, but exclusively free and rational investigation of the facts. In fact, this was already the way in which the Apostle **Paul** understood morality, because in his first letter to the Corinthians (10:23) he stated: "All things are lawful, but not all are convenient; all are lawful, but not all edify. "

In a previous article ("The foundations of spiritist ethics"; see Bibliographical Reference) we explained this process of **founding spiritist morals** to some extent. Given the relevance of the theme, we will use here some quotes from Kardec, in order to illustrate the point and make his position clear.

In the comments to **Questions 147 and 148 of The Spirits' Book**, which deal with materialism, Kardec refers to the hypothesis of the annihilation of being with bodily death:

"A sad consequence, if it were real, because then good and evil would have no purpose, man would be justified in thinking only of himself and in placing above all the satisfaction of his material pleasures; social ties would be broken, and the most holy affections would be broken beyond repair."

Let us now move on to Question 222 of the same book, where we find:

"Now, if you believe in any future, you certainly do not admit that it is identical for everyone, because otherwise, what is the use of good? Why should the man be embarrassed? Why would he fail to satisfy all his passions, all his desires, even at the expense of others, since that would not change his future condition?"

In Item IV of the Conclusion of this work Kardec is even more explicit (we highlight):

"Humanity's progress has its principle in the application of the law of justice, love and charity. Such a law is based on the certainty of the future; take away that certainty and you will take away the cornerstone. All others derive from this law, because it contains all the conditions for man's happiness."

In Item VIII Kardec reiterates:

"Therefore, we had reason to say that Spiritism, with the facts, killed materialism. Were this the only result he produced and he was already very grateful to the social order. However, it does more: it shows the inevitable effects of evil and, consequently, the need for good."

Chapter I of Genesis is full of considerations on this experimental-rational foundation of spiritist ethics. We strongly recommend reading at least Paragraphs 31, 32, 35, 37, 42, 56 and 62. From Paragraph 37 we extract this statement (we highlight):

"Take from man the free and independent spirit, surviving matter, and you will make him a simple organized machine, without purpose or responsibility [...]."

In Paragraph 42 we find:

"Furthermore, if one considers the moralizing power of Spiritism, for the purpose that subscribes to all actions of life, for making tangible the consequences of good and evil [...]."

In Paragraph 56 Kardec returns to the subject, this time analyzing the relationship between evangelical and spiritist morals, which, as noted, coincide in terms of moral norms (we highlight):

"What the teaching of the Spirits adds to the morals of Christ is the knowledge of the principles that govern the relations between the dead and the living, principles that complete the vague notions that it provided of the soul, its past and its future, and that give for sanctioning Christian doctrine the very laws of nature. With the help of the new lights that Spiritism and Spirits spread, man understands the solidarity that unites all beings; charity and fraternity become a social necessity; he does out of conviction what he did out of duty, and does it better."

Closing these remarkable quotes by Kardec, which in fact could go on for a long time, including, for example, Heaven and Hell, a work entirely dedicated to the theoretical and experimental study of the consequences of human actions, we return to **the comment on Questions 147 and 148 of The Spirits' Book**, which closes these reflections with a flourish:

"[...] the mission of Spiritism consists precisely in enlightening us about that future, in making us, to a certain extent, touch it with our finger and penetrate it with our eyes, no longer by reasoning alone, but by facts. Thanks to spiritist communications, it is no longer a simple assumption, a probability about which everyone conjectures at will, that poets embellish with their fictions, or accumulate deceptive allegorical images. It is reality that appears to us, since it is the beings from beyond the grave who come to describe the situation in which they find themselves, to report what they are doing, allowing us to assist, as it were, all the adventures of the new life that they live there and show us, by this means, the inevitable luck that is reserved for us, according to our merits and demerits. Is there anything anti-religious about this? Quite the contrary, since unbelievers find faith there and those who are lukewarm are renewed in fervor and trust. Spiritism is, therefore, the most powerful auxiliary of religion. If he is there, it is because God allows him and allows him so that our wavering hopes are reinvigorated and so that we are led back to the path of good from the perspective of the future."

Notes

1. In our quotations from the works of Allan Kardec we use the French originals, taking full advantage of the translations edited by the Brazilian Spiritist Federation; see References, at the end of this article.
2. "Spiritism and Science. Outline of an analysis of Spiritism in the light of the modern Philosophy of Science"; see References. The reader interested in the philosophy of science will be able to consult Alan Chalmers' book What is this thing called science, which is reasonably accessible and contains abundant references to primary sources.
3. See, for example, his famous article "Falsification and the methodology of scientific research programs", cited in Bibliographic References.
4. The inclusion of Psychology and Sociology is problematic, since they do not seem, in their current stage of development, to meet the minimum requirements of a true science. We spiritists have additional reasons for this doubt, given that such disciplines, intending to study the human being, ignore precisely what is most essential to him, that is, the Spirit.
5. This theme was also lucidly addressed in a recent article by Juvanir Borges de Souza, "Researches and Methods", published in the April 1986 issue of Reformador, which we strongly recommend reading.
6. "Is Le Spiritism un-religion?", Revue Spirite, 1868, p. 357. Transcribed in L'Obsession, pp. 279-92 (see References). A translation of this article, by Ismael Gomes Braga, appeared in Reformador, March 1976. The highlights in the quote above are ours.

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