

RESEARCH INTO THE EVIDENCE OF MAN'S SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH

A HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL SURVEY WITH A SUMMARY OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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Scientific research on the question of whether human personality survives physical death has been conducted for almost a century. The present article offers a summary of this research and accounts of some new developments in the field that have occurred within the past 15 years. The historical review is divided into three periods which, although not sharply separated, were characterized by different understandings and approaches both to the theoretical issues and to related empirical investigations.

In the first period, extending from the 1880s to the 1930s, the investigators mainly engaged in collecting, classifying, and analyzing spontaneous experiences of persons who saw apparitions of deceased persons or had other experiences that suggested to them some communication from a discarnate personality. This period also saw the beginning of the scientific investigation of persons (usually called mediums) who claim they can bring messages from deceased persons. Considerable experimentation during this period, including studies of extrasensory communication between living persons, gradually led some investigators to conclude that all, or nearly all, of the evidence seeming to arise from a discarnate personality could be explained more easily on the basis of telepathy between living persons or some far ranging power of clairvoyance on the part of a person who seemed to receive a communication from a deceased person.

In the second period, extending from the 1930s to about 1960, most parapsychologists neglected the question of the possibility of man's survival after physical death. They judged it wiser to defer a direct attack on the problem until after a more complete understanding had been achieved of the power and range of extrasensory perception on the part of living persons. During these years, nevertheless, some advances were made in the form of new types of empirical investigation and further efforts to clarify theoretical issues.

In the third period of investigation, dating from approximately 1960, proportionately more parapsychologists have entered this field of research; and they have tried to devise experiments that would exclude extrasensory perception between living persons (or on the part of a single living person) as a counterexplanation for communications apparently coming from deceased persons. In addition, some of them have exploited the distinction between cognitive information and skills. They have argued that, although there may be no limits to the transmission by extrasensory perception of cognitive information, skills cannot be transmitted either normally or by extrasensory perception. Thus, persons exhibiting a skill not learned normally may provide evidence of having acquired this skill either in a previous incarnation or through the influence of a discarnate person who, during his terrestrial life, had demonstrated the skill.

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In recent years the subject of death and dying, almost taboo in Western science for many years, has become a frequent and almost fashionable subject of inquiry (14, 32, 33, 45, 93). The flow of publications on death has provoked one editorial writer to mild protest (96); yet few of the investigators who have taken up this subject seem aware of a much longer tradition of scientific research into the question of whether human personality survives physical death.

Most scientists today regard the conjecture that human personality may survive death as unworthy of attention and perhaps even absurd. If they consider the question at all, they are likely to point to the unmistakable evidence from the use of such drugs as alcohol, lysergic acid diethylamide, and L-dopa that the state of our brain profoundly affects our mental activity; and since the brain manifestly disperses at death and no visible trace of its owner persists, it becomes easy to assume that he has also crumbled to nothing. But materialism, by which I mean here the belief that man consists only of the ingredients of his physical body, is itself an assumption. Memories may exist in the brain and also in a "somewhere else" that may endure after physical death. Certain reported phenomena ought not to occur if materialism is true; but since they do occur, materialism must be false. (This is a strong statement and I shall elaborate on it at the end of this paper.) Some of the reported phenomena have been observed for thousands of years, but their systematic recording and initial attempts at experimentation with them began less than 100 years ago. The present article offers a review of this research and a summary of recent developments in it.

PRESCIENTIFIC OBSERVATIONS

From as far back in time as we have credible records, and from nearly every society of which we have knowledge, reports have come down to us of events that have been attributed to the intervention of the dead in the affairs of the living. Certain persons of far ancient times, such as the witch of Endor (2), were thought to be capable of summoning the dead for sensi-

ble discourse; or the dead were thought to manifest sometimes in the dreams of sleeping persons and in the visions of waking ones.

Such phenomena were often reported by persons who evoke our confidence on other grounds. Thus, Plato (57) included in the 10th book of *The Republic* a rather detailed account of the case of Er, who was apparently killed in battle but revived before the cremation of his body. He narrated experiences that corresponded in many ways to reports of what parapsychologists today call out-of-the-body experiences.² Pliny the Younger (58) wrote a serious report of a haunted house that came to his attention. In the 18th century phenomena now considered paranormal³ were considered worthy of investigation and recording by members of the Wesley family (75), Samuel Johnson (4), and Immanuel Kant (31). In the 19th century Sir Walter Scott, the novelist (34, vol. 4, pp. 98-100), and Lord Brougham, Lord Chancellor in the Whig government of 1830 (6, vol. 1, pp. 146-148), gave personal testimony about experiences of this type occurring to them.

THE FIRST PERIOD OF SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION

In the second half of the 19th century Darwin's theory concerning the evolution of man from subhuman animals gave a severe shock to the traditional religions of the West by challenging the idea of the special creation of man and replacing this with the concept of his gradual evolution from subhuman animals. Indirectly Darwin's ideas about evolution also cast doubts on the belief that man had a soul or spirit that could, in principle, survive his physical death. The implications of his

² The term "out-of-the-body experience" refers to that of seeming to see one's physical body as if from another position in physical space, say above and to one side of the physical body. The experience occurs not infrequently to persons who have had serious nonfatal accidents, who have almost drowned, or who are undergoing anesthesia, especially light general anesthesia for obstetrics or dentistry. A small number of out-of-the-body experiences include extrasensory perception.

³ The word "paranormal" refers to a perception without mediation of the known sensory organs, or to a movement without participation, directly or indirectly, of known motor processes.

theories in this respect were quickly perceived by atheists and theologians alike;⁴ yet accounts of ghosts and apparitions continued to be told at this time, and claims of mediumship⁵ actually increased. Indeed, mediumship may have flourished in the 19th century precisely because the advances of science seemed to be undercutting man's traditional belief in life after death based on religious teachings. Perhaps nothing better illustrates the ideological conflicts of the times than the fact that Alfred Russel Wallace, who, with Darwin, developed the theory of evolution by means of natural selection, was an ardent spiritualist. His enthusiastic interest in this subject earned the disapproval of Darwin, but he never wavered in his conviction about the importance of the evidence of man's survival of death obtainable from some mediums.

In the 1870s and early 1880s, a small group of English scientists and scholars thought that the scientific method itself could be applied in the systematic study of the numerous cases of hauntings, apparitions, and mediumistic communications that at that time were much discussed but little investigated. They accordingly founded the Society for Psychical Research in 1882 and started on the formidable task of systematic research into all of the phenomena of the type mentioned that were then (and still are) inexplicable by the accepted "laws" of science.

The founders of the Society for Psychical Research (S.P.R.) and the persons who

took an active interest in its investigations during the first 30 years of its existence formed a remarkable group of distinguished scholars and scientists. Many persons eminent in other branches of science supported the work of the Society and lent their names and energies to its pursuits. The presidents and vice-presidents of this period included several persons who were, earlier or later, awarded Nobel Prizes (Charles Richet, Lord Rayleigh, J. J. Thomson, and Henri Bergson), as well as other persons equally distinguished in science and philosophy, such as Sir William Crookes, Sir Oliver Lodge, William James, and Camille Flammarion. These people did not necessarily endorse any particular results, although some did; but they did wholeheartedly support the Society's goal of investigating the phenomena in question. (The Society itself adopted no collective position on any matter that came before it except that of the importance of its researches.) I have not mentioned the persons of distinction who encouraged and advanced the work of the S.P.R. because I wish to claim the weight of prestige in judgments about the accomplishments of psychical research—or parapsychology, as this subject is usually called today. If I were to do so, the argument could be used against me, since the successors of the pioneers of this field have definitely not had the backing of the successors of the distinguished physicists and chemists who encouraged the pioneers. The encouragement that these early investigators did receive testifies to the seriousness with which they were regarded by contemporaries who were respected in their own fields of accomplishment; and the S.P.R. seems fully to have merited the confidence it received. No one has expressed this more clearly than William James, who wrote: "Were I asked to point to a scientific journal where hardheadedness and never-sleeping suspicion of sources of error might be seen in their full bloom, I think I should have to fall back on the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. The common run of papers, say on physiological subjects, which one finds in other professional organs, are apt

⁴ An excellent impression of the boldness with which scientists challenged the accepted teachings of religion in the decades following the publication in 1859 of *The Origin of Species* may be obtained from an examination of Galton's paper "Objective Efficacy of Prayer," first published in 1872 (16).

⁵ A medium receives her (or his) name because of the assumption that such a person acts as a conduit for messages from deceased persons; the personalities manifesting through a medium, *soi-disant* discarnate persons, are known as communicators. An occasion for an attempt to receive communications from discarnate minds through a medium is called a sitting, or séance, and the persons present, other than the medium, are called sitters. Someone who believes that all, or most, mediums do in fact bring communications from deceased persons is called a spiritualist.

to show a far lower level of critical consciousness" (29, pp. 303-304).

The investigations of this period fell into two broad groups. The first included the experiences that occurred to persons spontaneously, a group that has since become known as "spontaneous cases." This group includes all spontaneous apparent communications (without the mediation of the known senses) between living persons or between living persons and dead ones; experiences of apparitions and hauntings; visions had by persons near death; and out-of-the-body experiences. (Various inexplicable physical phenomena were also investigated, but as most of these fall outside the purview of this paper, they will not be further considered here.) The English investigators interrogated a large number of witnesses for such cases, analyzed the information yielded, and embodied the results of their labors in two major books (19, 44), as well as in many volumes of the long series of *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*.

The early investigators were not wrong in surmising that experiences of the kind they wished to study occurred frequently. A questionnaire answered by 17,000 informants showed that just under 10 per cent of the respondents had had at least one hallucinatory experience; that is, a visual, auditory, or tactile perception for which there appeared to be no normal stimulus (72). Most of the experiences were mainly or exclusively visual. Fifteen per cent of the percipients were reported to have seen apparitions of recognized dead persons; the remainder saw apparitions of recognized living persons or other figures, or they had miscellaneous perceptions. The early S.P.R. investigators also discovered patterns—that is, recurrent similar characteristics—in cases of the same general group. Sometimes the recurrent characteristics of carefully investigated cases accorded with what might be called the traditional or folkloric concept of such cases. Thus, the investigators found, as tradition had told, that situations involving death, or nearly fatal illnesses and accidents, figured frequently in the events that seemed to precipitate apparitions. In

other respects, however, the investigated cases did not conform to the popular view. For example, unlike the ghost of Hamlet's father and some other ghosts of fiction, the apparitions experienced in what seemed to be authentic cases were taciturn and rarely spoke.

Mediumistic communications comprised the second large group of experiences to which the early investigators gave attention. They were fully aware that most of the communications that mediums purported to transmit from discarnate persons could be attributed either to outright fraud or to some other normal source of the information communicated. This might occur even when the medium was completely honest and had no awareness of prior access to the relevant information. After setting aside a large mass of material of this sort, however, the investigators still had a small remainder of communications that appeared to be inexplicable along normal lines. These seemed to require minimally the possession by the medium of a powerful capacity for what we now call extrasensory perception.

Mrs. Leonore Piper was by far the most important of American mediums. William James "discovered" her, and her extraordinary knowledge of the intimate family affairs of the people who came to her séances kept him baffled but favorably impressed to the end of his life (28). No one ever found the least evidence of trickery on the part of Mrs. Piper. The equally gifted English medium, Mrs. Osborne Leonard, belonged to a somewhat later generation. Like Mrs. Piper, she was the object of intensive and extensive investigations with regard both to her honesty, never successfully impugned, and to the sources of the extraordinary private knowledge she showed about the affairs of her sitters.

Also developed and published during this phase was an extensive series of mediumistic communications that became known as "cross-correspondences" (35, 55, 56). The name derives from the fact that different mediums, not in normal contact with each other, independently communicated messages that taken singly made no sense but that, when fitted together, did.

These communications were interpreted as evidence of a design on the part of the ostensibly communicating discarnate intelligences who claimed credit for the idea.

The early investigators did not examine only the question of the provenance of communications purportedly coming from the dead. They also studied the related question of the ontological status of the different personalities who manifested during mediumistic trances. Some mediums, often now called sensitives, exhibit paranormal knowledge without going into a trance or, if they do seem to enter a trance, without undergoing any marked change of personality (52). When most mediums go into trance, however, their habitual personalities are no longer expressed; instead, another personality manifests and it is, at least in appearance, quite different from the medium's ordinary one. If such a trance personality regularly appears through the medium and also assumes some leadership or dominance of the proceedings it is known as the medium's "control." The control may act as an intermediary for other supposedly discarnate persons who transmit their messages to the control for it to relay through the vocal apparatus of the medium. In some cases these other communicators themselves replace the control and seem to communicate directly through the medium (64, 88; 89). The early investigators soon found that many controls could not give a satisfactory account with verifiable information of the terrestrial lives they said they had lived before dying into the discarnate world they claimed to inhabit. Psychologists and psychiatrists of the 19th and early 20th centuries had considerable experience with persons having secondary or multiple personalities, most of whom had no paranormal powers. Psychical researchers began then to consider that most mediumistic controls and other communicators might be instances of secondary personalities, that is, that they were temporarily and partially detached, semiautonomous portions of the medium's mind. Such improvised personalities would be released during the trance state and have no existence, despite their claims to the con-

trary, independent of it. It was shown to the satisfaction of investigators that some controls and other mediumistic communicators were adequately explained as secondary personalities of the mediums concerned (15, 70). It remains an open question whether this conclusion should be generalized to all mediumistic communicators or applied to some only.

CRITICISMS OF THE EVIDENCE OF SURVIVAL DEVELOPED DURING THE FIRST PERIOD OF SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION

The evidence in the spontaneous cases of hauntings, apparitions, communications from the deceased through dreams, and similar phenomena soon came under criticism because of alleged unreliability of the witnesses. The early investigators did not deny flaws in much of the testimony they had gathered; indeed, they exposed these as fully as possible in order, they believed, to show that a residue of cases could not be dismissed on the grounds of witness unreliability. There were, for example, cases in which a written record had been made of the subject's experience, of seeing an apparition for instance, before he could have had any normal knowledge of the death of the appearing person, which had occurred at the same time in some distant place; and this death and its date were also sometimes documented in written records. These records may certainly contain errors, sometimes important ones, but when they are made in advance of the development of a case, we can at least know that they have not occurred from a desire to promote it. Proponents of the investigations of spontaneous cases asserted that the testimony assembled for many cases was stronger than that often used to send a man to the gallows; to which their opponents replied that many innocent men had been hanged and the criteria of the law were insufficient for matters so important as science.

The evidence developed from mediumship, in cases where the honesty of the mediums was granted, came under criticism also for a different reason. It was pointed out, quite correctly, that many mediumistic statements purporting to give

messages from the dead were widely general in their indications, might apply to almost anyone, and were all too often credulously accepted as referring only to one person when in fact they might be true of several persons or even many. Advocates for the evidence from mediumship responded by drawing attention to instances in which the medium had made extremely detailed statements, including proper names, with a specificity leaving no reasonable doubt that the statements corresponded to facts in the life of one person, to whom alone they could apply.

When it was realized that the statements of at least a few mediums purporting to come from discarnate minds could not be explained by trickery, other normal means of communication, or general applicability, the suggestion was made quite early that they might be due to extrasensory communication between living persons (telepathy) rather than to communications from deceased persons. This interpretation became increasingly favored during the second half of this first period of investigation because of two developments.

First, considerable evidence was accumulated that showed the likelihood, if not the certainty, that living humans often do communicate without the known sensory organs. This evidence derived not only from numerous spontaneous experiences, but also from a considerable body of experimental investigation. The latter work has been sometimes unduly neglected under the mistaken impression that no serious experimental investigations in parapsychology occurred before those initiated at Duke University in the 1930s.⁶

Second, some communications that closely resembled in form those ostensibly emanating from the dead were found to relate correctly to persons who were in fact still living (26, 74). Since these communications clearly derived exclusively from processes between living persons, whether or not the purported communicators were active agents, they tended to undermine

the attribution of other similar communications to discarnate minds.

In the 1920s some experiments were conducted in which Mrs. Leonard showed detailed knowledge of certain books (located on shelves of a private library, for example) that it is certain she had not seen and that, in some instances, the persons present with her at the time she made her statements had not seen (71). These experiments were interpreted by investigators who favored the idea of survival as evidence that discarnate minds working with the medium had gone to the book in question, somehow "read" it while it was still closed, and returned to communicate the correct information through the medium; but the results also lay open to the interpretation that they simply demonstrated the far ranging and almost unlimited powers of some living persons to gather information paranormally from any source; that is, either from living persons (telepathy), from written material (clairvoyance), or from both. When proponents of the survival hypothesis pointed out that the usual evidence of extrasensory perception between living persons obtained under laboratory conditions was generally of a low order of magnitude — this being a mere figure of speech, since no investigator has claimed he could measure extrasensory perception — the reply was made that certain mediums simply had limitless powers of extrasensory perception. Thus was developed what has become known as the super-extrasensory perception hypothesis, which credits some mediums with just such unlimited powers of extrasensory perception for obtaining information from living persons and printed or other sources. Apparitions, which had seemed earlier, at least to some investigators, to offer evidence of the actual presence of a deceased person showing himself to the percipient, were now interpreted as due to an elaborate subconscious construction on the part of the percipient, who used in this dramatization information telepathically derived (94). Even the cross-correspondences were viewed as conceivably due to a subconscious design on the part of one of the participating mediums; the others

⁶ Readers interested in the evidence for this assertion will find it in references cited at the end of this article (7, 11, 20, 30, 43, 65, 73, 97, 98).

were then supposed to have sent in compliantly their parts of the puzzle that were required to make sense of the other related communications.

On the principle of parsimony in hypotheses, super-extrasensory perception seemed to provide an adequate explanation of all evidence that had earlier been interpreted as indicating the agency of deceased persons. The hypothesis of survival after physical death appeared otiose, at least as an explanation of the types of phenomena for which it had previously been adduced. At the same time, the growing evidence of extrasensory perception possessed by living persons indicated the existence of a noncorporeal aspect to human beings which, in principle, could survive physical death. It was therefore somewhat ironic that this very evidence appeared to undermine what had previously been thought of as more direct evidence of survival after death. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that, toward the end of this period, some persons who were well informed about the evidence—the only ones with opinions worth listening to—were convinced that human personality survives bodily death (36, 88), but others were not (12, 65).

THE SECOND PERIOD OF SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION

The first scientific phase in the study of the evidence of survival after death lasted from the 1880s to the 1930s. The next phase lasted until approximately 1960. For the reasons just stated, parapsychologists generally came to believe that a direct attack on the question of survival after death was premature at best and hopeless at worst. In keeping with this view most of them ignored the subject (during this second period) and turned their attention to studies of extrasensory perception with living persons as agents (telepathy) or with the use of cards or drawings as concealed and unknown targets (clairvoyance).

This period was not, however, completely devoid of important further endeavors to develop evidence capable of combating hypotheses rivaling that of survival. For example, J. G. Pratt (62, 63)

developed a method for the systematic analysis of the statements of mediums that would reduce the errors made by persons who tend to accept general statements as applicable to themselves or their relatives; and although such errors could not be completely eliminated, it became possible to estimate their effect on judgments of verbal material by requiring the cooperating sitter to rate groups of statements made for himself and for other cooperators without the rater knowing which material he was rating, that is, whether it had been intended for him or for another sitter with the same medium in the same group of experiments.

Attempts were also made to counteract the suggestion that a medium demonstrating correct information about a deceased person was obtaining it (by telepathy) from the mind of some person present who knew the correct facts. One change in tactics designed to meet this objection provided for a proxy sitter at a mediumistic séance. In experiments of this type, a person wishing information about a deceased person would not himself attend a séance, but would send his request for information from a discarnate personality to another person who would represent the inquirer at the sitting. The proxy sitter would himself be completely ignorant concerning the deceased person about whom information was sought. Although some successful experiments of this type were carried out (90), they mainly stimulated only an expansion of the hypothesis of super-extrasensory perception. The proponents of this theory now suggested that the medium had somehow gotten in touch telepathically with the inquirer who knew the facts correctly stated by the medium, the latter perhaps being guided to "find" the knowledgeable living person through his contacts with the proxy who attended the relevant sitting.

H. Carrington (10) and, a little later, W. Carington (9) conducted experiments using word-association tests by which they hoped to discriminate the normal personalities of mediums from the main manifesting personalities (the controls) who appeared during the mediums' trances and

who were (for the most part) the personalities giving the communications ostensibly coming from the dead. Although later parapsychologists have considered these investigations indecisive in excluding alternative interpretations, the concepts underlying them remain valid and may yet be pursued with superior techniques.

In the 1950s Hart (25) took up again the study of recurrent characteristics in large numbers of spontaneous cases and sought patterns in cases of apparitions and those of persons having out-of-the-body experiences. He looked for and found uniformities in the reports of persons who saw apparitions of deceased persons and of those who saw apparitions of living persons who were, at the time, having an out-of-the-body experience. Not many such persons "appear" to other persons in other places, but a few have been reported to do so (3, 25). Hart found a significant resemblance between the characteristics of apparitions having a living agent and those having *prima facie* a deceased one. He concluded that, as the apparitions of living persons were associated with a real living person, the similarity of such apparitions to those concerning a dead person indicated that these latter might be generated (not necessarily volitionally) by persons who had survived physical death (25).

During this second phase, the eminent psychologist Gardner Murphy contributed a noteworthy series of three essays on the survival problem (40-42). Murphy concluded that the evidence accumulated to the time of his writing was, at least for him, inconclusive; but the seriousness with which he reviewed and weighed that evidence showed that he did not consider those persons unreasonable who, unlike himself, decided that the balance favored survival after death. Murphy contributed an ingenious proposal for an experiment that would, if successful, go far toward excluding the super-extrasensory perception hypothesis. He suggested that persons who survived death might meet (in the presumed discarnate world) and there discover that they had in common a particular interest, such as collecting rare old Wedgwood china. If these discarnate per-

sons had lived in widely separated parts of the world and had not known each other when terrestrially incarnated, the fact of their *common* interest in collecting old Wedgwood china would be unknown to any living person (41). A medium might, in principle, be able to obtain such information from the various living persons who had known about the unusual interest the deceased persons had in common; but from where would come the motivation for the medium to search for and discover such information about these particular persons? It would seem more reasonable to attribute the revelation of an interest shared by these persons—who did not know each other when living—to one or more of these persons themselves, dead though they would be.

At the end of this period the English philosopher C. D. Broad also examined the evidence for survival after death of which he had been an almost lifelong student. His discontent with the miseries of terrestrial existence made personally uncongenial to him the idea that something like it might continue after death. He therefore approached his last statements on the evidence of survival with a personal inclination to find weaknesses in it. He nevertheless concluded: "I should be slightly more annoyed than surprised if I should find myself in some sense persisting immediately after the death of my present body" (5, p. 430).

Despite the emphasis parapsychologists gave during this period to experimental investigations of extrasensory perception on the part of living persons, and their (the parapsychologists') almost total neglect of the survival question, evidence was not lacking that ordinary people continued to have experiences, such as of apparitions of the dead, which suggested the agency of deceased persons. An English survey reported by West (99)—one conducted on a smaller group, but with more systematic sampling of the population surveyed than had been the case with the census of hallucinations of the 1880s mentioned above (72)—showed that slightly over 14 per cent of the respondents reported having had at least one hallucinatory experience; and 9

per cent of these reported the experience of seeing an apparition of a dead person.

THE THIRD AND PRESENT PERIOD OF SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION

The preceding section has shown that at least some parapsychologists continued to interest themselves in the survival question during the second period even when most of them did not. At the beginning of the 1960s, however, interest and activity in this field of investigation increased again. This was partly due to the availability of additional funds for research in this area of parapsychology. One endowment established the Psychological Research Foundation (Durham, N. C.), which was founded in 1960 expressly for the purpose of conducting research into the question of survival after death; and in 1972 the American Society for Psychical Research (A.S.P.R.) won through litigation the use of funds that a testator had left specifically for use in such research. Investigators associated with the A.S.P.R. have taken a leading part in the scientific study of the evidence of survival after death ever since the Society was founded in 1885.

The general public appears to have been little influenced by parapsychologists' comparative neglect of the survival question. At least when given the opportunity, they continue to report having experiences, such as of apparitions, which seem to them to derive from discarnate persons. Mackenzie (37) published accounts and summaries of 97 cases of apparitions and hauntings in Great Britain, many of them of fairly recent occurrence, that had been notified to him when he communicated his interest in the subject to radio and television audiences. Palmer, in a survey of psychical experiences among a systematically sampled population of a small American city (Charlottesville, Va.), found that 12.3 per cent of the respondents reported having had an experience that seemed to derive from a discarnate person (53).⁷

During this third period, parapsychologists have perhaps given most attention to a renewed investigation of the so-called

⁷ Palmer, J. Personal communication, July 11, 1975.

out-of-the-body experience, which, as I mentioned in an earlier section of this review, had interested the pioneer investigators of the 19th century. Out-of-the-body experiences had early been compared to hallucinations of the self, sometimes called autoscopic hallucinations and Doppelgänger phenomena. Some parapsychologists have thought that the experience of seeming to be out of one's body and able to look at it as if from another position in physical space might be nothing but a variety of lucid dream, that is, one in which the dreamer is aware that he is dreaming. They have suggested that, if an out-of-the-body experience included any extrasensory perception, as some of them do, its dramatization as due to an apparent bilocation of the subject could have explanatory and even defensive value for the percipient's understanding of his extrasensory perception. The new investigations therefore focused attention on the effort to discriminate claimed out-of-the-body experiences from other experiences that included extrasensory perception in which the percipient did not claim to be out of his body. Toward this end Osis (50) devised a somewhat complicated apparatus with targets whose arrangements within a container could only be identified provided they were viewed from a particular position in physical space. This was located above the percipient's physical body and well out of range of his normal vision. In principle at least, the percipient could not correctly describe the targets in the container if he used only "ordinary" extrasensory perception.

Morris (39) conducted a variety of experiments in which human, animal, and various physical detectors were placed in a room out of sensory range of the experimental subject whose task was then to get out of his body and stimulate the detector or detectors while in this condition. Two groups of independent observers monitored the subject and the detectors; the monitors did not know during which of the experimental periods the subject would endeavor to get out of his body.

Although many persons who have had one spontaneous out-of-the-body experi-

ence report that they have had several of them, persons who claim to have such experiences voluntarily are rare, and those who provide credible evidence of doing so are even rarer. This has led to explorations for new methods of assisting those who wish to have such experiences to do so under experimental conditions. Palmer (54) has experimented with a variety of techniques designed to facilitate the occurrence of the out-of-the-body experience; these are combined with opportunities for the subject to demonstrate extrasensory perception, if he can, and also to report afterward on his subjective experiences. Analysis of the variables in these experiments may lead to better understanding of conditions that favor out-of-the-body experiences and of characteristics that may discriminate such experiences from others in which the subject demonstrates "ordinary" extrasensory perception.

Osis (48) returned to the study of deathbed visions initiated many years earlier by Hyslop (27) and Barrett (1). He sent out 10,000 questionnaires to doctors and nurses likely to have had some contact with dying patients. An analysis of the 640 questionnaires returned confirmed Barrett's observation that when dying persons have hallucinations they "predominantly hallucinate phantoms representing dead persons, who often claim to aid the patient's transition into postmortem existence" (48, p. 104). Osis has repeated his first survey of deathbed visions with another sample in the United States and also with one in India in collaboration with E. Haraldsson; results of these second and third surveys have not yet been published in detail (51).

Persons who have close brushes with death, for example from long falls during mountain climbing, or who are actually pronounced dead and then revive, sometimes describe experiences that touch on the question of man's survival after physical death (38, 46, 47). These persons may report having seen their physical bodies as if from another position in space; they frequently claim that scenes of their childhood and later events flashed through their minds (panoramic memory); and

they may also describe a variety of mystical experiences. The experience of nearly dying is usually described as pleasant, and often as transforming the attitudes of the person having it; most persons who appear to die and then recover claim they have lost all fear of death. However, the published reports of close encounters with death have not yet contributed anything to the objective evidence of the survival of human personality after death. Experiences reported by such persons may derive from adaptive forces mobilized in the face of death. On the other hand, a further investigation of such cases may show that this interpretation does not adequately account for all aspects of the experiences reported by persons who nearly die and then recover. For example, in some (unpublished) cases of this type that I have investigated, the subjects appear to have had paranormal knowledge of events occurring during the time when they were ostensibly dead, which events took place outside the normal sensory reach of the subject even if he had been fully conscious at the time. Moreover, the claim often made by persons who have had such experiences that they enjoyed complete mental clarity, and even an improved ability to think, at a time when to other observers their bodies were dead or about to become so, shows that much remains to be understood about the mind-brain relationship.

The study of mediumship has been renewed in recent years with further endeavors to evaluate more precisely the statements made by mediums and to find some means of excluding extrasensory perception on the part of the medium as an interpretation for apparent communications from deceased persons.

With regard to the first of these two issues, parapsychologists have continued to consider the best methods for assessing the statements of mediums. They want sitters to give material intended for them the best possible rating consonant with their remaining ignorant about which parts of the material they are rating were actually intended for them. Schmeidler (69) reported positive results in the analysis of a medium's statements for which she

modified the method of Pratt and Birge (63) mentioned earlier. Schmeidler's method assigned a greater weight in the assessment to correct statements that were judged unusual or unique as compared with those that might have a wide applicability to many persons. Roll and his colleagues introduced proposals for further improvements in the Pratt-Birge method (8, 66-68). Unfortunately, positive results with the Pratt-Birge method and its successors have been meager. This may be due to the small number of investigations in which it has been applied, which, in turn, may derive from a shortage of mediums and sensitives who are both gifted with paranormal powers and willing to cooperate with scientists.

The method developed by Pratt and its subsequent refinements all require the medium and the sitters (or co-operators) to have no sensory contact with each other. The medium and sitters should not see or hear each other. In this way the medium cannot pick up information from the sitter normally, and the sitter cannot know, before he rates the medium's statements, what the medium has said about him. These conditions, however, are certainly unnatural and possibly inhibiting to mediums who, as they work in their own settings, have the sitters in front of them and talk directly to them. In 1968 I reported a method of analyzing the statements of a medium obtained under what I consider the natural situation of allowing the medium and sitters to be face to face during a session (76). The method relies mainly on the separate analysis of statements—for example, of proper names, dates, and distinctive features of appearance—the correctness of which can be objectively verified. In one application of this method I obtained positive results that indicated some paranormal process; but the medium could have derived the correct information telepathically from me, so I have not interpreted the results of this particular experiment as suggesting the influence of a discarnate person.

A colleague and I (23) conducted with a medium (Hafsteinn Björnsson) an experiment in which the sitters and the medium

were in the same room but sensorially isolated from each other so that the medium could not see or hear the sitters, and the sitters (who were not identified in any way to the medium) could not see or hear the medium. The results were significantly positive, the medium giving considerable information about deceased members of the sitters' families. This experiment showed that sensory separation of the medium and the sitters does not necessarily lead to negative results. The method itself was a compromise—agreeable to the medium who participated in the experiment—between total isolation of the medium from the persons who sought information and normal sensory contact with them. Unfortunately an attempt to replicate this experiment by Haraldsson and Pratt (unpublished data) did not succeed.

As mentioned earlier, proxy sittings in which the person present with the medium represented an inquirer, but knew nothing himself about the deceased person about whom information was being sought, were not thought sufficiently invulnerable to the theory of super-extrasensory perception. Osis (49) conducted experiments in which the proxy sitter was not directly in touch with a living person wanting information from a deceased person, but only with his representative. Thus the links were further lengthened between the medium and the person or persons who would be in a position to verify information that might purport to emanate from a deceased person. It was argued that this would make it more difficult for the medium to identify the concerned living persons and obtain information from them by extrasensory perception. Unfortunately, no clearly positive results were obtained by this method; but even if positive results had been obtained, they would have been susceptible to the interpretation of being due to super-extrasensory perception.

The principle of attenuating connections between a medium and persons capable of furnishing information to her telepathically was carried one step further by the investigation of communicators who were, at the time they manifested, completely unknown to anyone present, medium or

sitters; nor did anyone present desire a communication from them, as was the case in proxy sittings. In cases of this kind, the existence of such persons was only verified later. Because such communicators are not actively sought, but appear to come uninvited, they have been called "drop in" communicators. A few instances of this type were published during the first (44) and second (18, 95, 100) periods of research in this subject. In recent years, however, some investigators have given renewed attention to "drop in" communicators, about which several reports have been published (17, 21, 22, 80, 81). Authentic cases of this type present a challenge to the proponent of the hypothesis of super-extrasensory perception. He must not only maintain that the medium concerned in such a case has virtually unlimited powers of extrasensory perception by which she can derive information from any source in the world; he must also account for why the medium would select one particular person as the object for such paranormal delvings as would be required to derive the correctly stated information and present it in the form of a communication from a deceased person.

It cannot be denied, however, that the information permitting verification of statements about "drop in" communicators does exist somewhere, or they could not be verified. Attempts have therefore been made to devise tests that would require for their success no living person or written record. These developed out of sealed messages which some of the early investigators in this field left behind at their deaths. They proposed to try to communicate the contents of the messages after their deaths. In fact, no clear success has been claimed for any of these attempts; but even if they had apparently succeeded, the objection might still have been raised that the medium who correctly gave the sealed message had learned its contents by reading it clairvoyantly. Posthumous messages suffered from the further disadvantage that the success of a test could only be ascertained by opening the seal and reading the message, and this in effect precluded any further trials with that particu-

lar message. Thouless overcame both of these difficulties by devising a test consisting of a ciphered message (91, 92). He alone knows the key to the cipher he used in encoding his message. Mediums may try to learn it from him while he is living. If they fail before his death, and, if one succeeds afterward in giving the key to his ciphered message, then the hypothesis that Thouless, surviving death, has communicated it himself will seem reasonable.

Since enciphering a message is not easy, I adapted the important principles of Thouless' cipher test to a combination lock test (79, 83). The purchaser of a combination lock can reset the combination to a new number known only to himself. Ideally, he should never write down the new combination, but if he does, he should afterward destroy the written record so that no clue to the combination exists anywhere except in his memory. If a person participating in this test has difficulty remembering numbers, he can translate the new combination of the lock into a mnemonic word or phrase that he will try to remember after his death. Communications of number combinations relevant to a combination lock test may be offered any number of times without spoiling the test. All are declared wrong until one combination opens the lock. As with the cipher test of Thouless, mediums may try to learn about the combinations of the locks, and their associated mnemonics, while the lock owners are still living.⁸

The previously mentioned idea that super-extrasensory perception might account for all evidence that otherwise suggests survival of human personality after death itself rests on some assumptions. First, it supposes that there are in fact no limits of time, distance, or penetrability to extrasensory perception as manifested by at least some gifted persons. This is in fact still an open question, but since it is open, proponents of the super-extrasensory per-

⁸ I have discussed elsewhere (79) the possibility, extremely small in my opinion, that a medium or sensitive might succeed in opening a combination lock by clairvoyance, that is by reading (extrasensorially) the positions of the pins and levers in the lock.

ception hypothesis have asserted that direct attacks on the question of survival after death should await more definite, if not final, evidence concerning the limits of extrasensory perception on the part of living persons. For heuristic purposes, however, we may concede that extrasensory perception has no limits in space or time in order to see what conclusions would follow. This brings us to the important distinction between cognitive knowledge and skills.

C. J. Ducasse (13) pointed out that personality consists of more than isolated bits of cognitive information; these units are organized and used by the persons having them in patterns or styles that are characteristic of them and that may be, in at least some instances, unique for a particular person. Ducasse admitted that a medium might, in principle, obtain by extrasensory perception all of the cognitive information another person had, but he denied that the medium could thereby make *the same use* of the information that the person himself would make. A medium might, he argued, obtain all of a Latin scholar's knowledge of Latin from his mind by telepathy; but she would not be able to apply this knowledge with the scholar's particular flair and idiosyncratic pedantries. Only the scholar himself could use his knowledge in his unique manner. Ducasse therefore believed that exhibitions by mediums of unusual skills beyond the medium's known capacities would constitute evidence of the survival of someone after death; if the skill manifested could be attributed uniquely to a particular person, then it would constitute evidence of that person's survival after death. Although Ducasse did not mention Polanyi in his writings, he was in fact drawing the distinction that Polanyi (59-61) emphasized between cognitive knowledge (knowledge about) and skills (knowledge how to). Polanyi argued that we cannot exhibit a skill except by learning it through practice. Instruction in skills such as dancing, speaking a foreign language, or riding a bicycle may help us to learn the skill more quickly, but can never take the place of the actual practice required in order to learn a skill. According to Polanyi, skills

are essentially incommunicable; they belong therefore to the group of things we know, but cannot say, or what he called tacit knowing. If skills cannot be communicated normally, it follows at least equally, if not *a fortiori*, that they cannot be communicated by extrasensory perception. Ducasse (13) referred to responsive xenoglossy, the ability of a subject to speak in intelligent conversation a foreign language not normally learned, as a possible instance of the demonstration of a skill that he would, in principle, consider evidence of survival after death. He did not, however, cite a particular instance of responsive xenoglossy, for the probable reason that up to the time of his writing none had been published with sufficiently detailed documentation to justify confidence that the subject had in fact spoken a foreign language not normally learned. Since then, however, I have investigated three cases of responsive xenoglossy. I have published reports of two of these cases (84, 87) and am preparing a report of the third and most recent one.

Cases of the reincarnation type provide other important evidences of the survival of human personality after death. Many of them show a type of skill, that of particular behavioral and emotional responses, that cannot be readily explained by the hypothesis of super-extrasensory perception. But before I describe this feature of these cases, it will be helpful if I first discuss their purely cognitive aspects.

Although the belief in reincarnation is an ancient one throughout large parts of Asia, Africa, and North America, it was not known until recently that many persons claim to remember previous lives. When the person making such a claim is an adult, it can easily be supposed that he acquired by normal means whatever accurate information he may possess about the deceased person whose life he claims to remember. In many instances, however, young children, usually between the ages of 2 and 4, claim to remember that they have lived before; and sometimes they make accurate statements about previous lives that occurred in places far removed, either by actual distance or by limited

means of transport, from their own homes. In nearly all instances of this type the parents of the subjects claim to have had the child under adequate surveillance and to be confident that he could not have learned normally about the deceased person whose life he says he remembers. Unfortunately, investigators rarely reach cases of this type before the child and his family have met the family of the deceased person about whom the child has been talking; and when they do not, some mingling of memories may lead to the child's being credited later with more accurate information about the deceased person concerned than he actually showed before he and his family learned normally about that person. Judgments about the authenticity of the case then depend on assessments of the reliability of the informants, especially with regard to the accuracy of their memories. It seems likely that in some cases of this type the adult informants have distorted and amplified what the child has said; but this explanation cannot be used against a small number of cases in which a written record was made of what the child had said about the previous life before his statements were verified (77, 78, 86). Moreover, in a considerable number of other cases, investigators have reached the scene of the case within a few weeks of its main events; errors of memory due to the passage of time are much reduced in such instances, although errors due to biases may not be.⁹

Cases of the reincarnation type in which normal acquisition of the correct information by the subject seems unlikely, or is even excluded altogether, may be open to other explanations not requiring the hypothesis of survival after death. It has been suggested, for example, that the child may derive his correct information by processes of extrasensory perception; in a culture favorable to the belief in reincarnation he may then build up a secondary personality constructed from information paranormally derived and shaped into culturally acceptable "previous life memo-

ries." This interpretation, however, suffers from weaknesses of its own. In the first place, it does not adequately account for the fact that (with rare exceptions) the subjects of cases of the reincarnation type show no evidence of having powers of extrasensory perception apart from the claimed memories of a previous life. It may reasonably be asked why a child with paranormal powers of the sort that would be required to obtain all of the correct information that many of these children show would not manifest such powers in other situations or with regard to other persons besides the single deceased person whose life the subject claims to remember.

Considered solely with regard to their cognitive aspects, cases of the reincarnation type appear to have the strengths and also the weaknesses of mediumistic cases of the "drop in" type. Both are in principle open to the interpretation of super-extrasensory perception. On the other hand, both pose the problem of why the medium, or the child subject, as the case may be, selects one particular person out of all others to personate with the help of paranormally derived information. In this respect, cases of the reincarnation type have some advantage over those of "drop in" communicators. Mediums for the latter are credited with paranormal powers that they have exhibited on other occasions. In contrast, the subjects of reincarnation cases (with rare exceptions) have never demonstrated any paranormal powers outside the claimed memories of a previous life.

Cases of the reincarnation type, however, have other features besides the demonstration of cognitive information apparently derived paranormally. The subject of such a case is likely to manifest, over a period of several years and sometimes longer, behavior that is unusual for a child in his family, but that is harmonious with that of the deceased person whose life he says he remembers. The deviant behavior, for example of special interests in food, clothing, and activities, can be so unusual—if not unique—that it may constitute collectively a skill of the sort Ducasse considered to provide evidence for the sur-

⁹ For a summary of research into cases of the reincarnation type, see Stevenson (85).

vival of a personality after death. It is difficult to conceive how such patterns of behavior could be communicated by extrasensory perception. To accommodate authentic cases of the reincarnation type that are rich both in detailed statements and in associated unusual behavior shown by the subject with the hypothesis of super-extrasensory perception requires extension of that hypothesis so that it becomes no more credible than that of survival after death.

It is also worthy of note that unusual behavior shown by such a child that appears to derive from behavioral memories of a previous life sometimes appears in more or less discrete "attacks." During these "attacks" the child appears to be living in a "present time" for him that is nevertheless a "past time" for persons watching him. On other occasions, however, the same child may show awareness of the passage of time and have the experience then of remembering, as if from his own past, the previous life in which, at other times, he seems still to be living. Furthermore, behavior seemingly derived from the remembered previous life, such as a tendency to miserliness, may manifest simultaneously with behavior presumably derived from the influences of the "present life" (77, 78, 82, 86).

Such a blending of one personality with another was suggested by Hart (24) as a possible explanation for some of the puzzling anomalies observed in the study of mediumship and, more particularly, of the personalities manifesting as communicators through mediums. Hart acknowledged, as have all serious students of mediumship, that some of the trance personalities could be adequately understood as mere secondary personalities of the medium; but he suggested that others might result from a melding of elements in the medium's personality with other elements derived from an actual discarnate personality who was trying to communicate. To describe such a mixed personality Hart aptly borrowed the Jungian word *persona*.

The theoretical arguments of Ducasse and Polanyi, and the empirical investigations of cases of mediumship, of responsive xenoglossy, and of the reincarnation type that provide a practical arena for debate

on these issues, have presented an opportunity—one might almost say a requirement—for a fresh examination of many old ideas about the nature of human personality. Once considered about as well defined as an orange by its skin or a tree by its bark, human personalities now appear to be much more extensible and penetrable than they were thought to be. They can invade and be invaded by processes of extrasensory perception. They may even blend together in the manifestation of a different personality that appears to be new, but that in fact may derive from a fusion of the new and the old.

If the observations that have led to the conclusions just stated come to be widely accepted as facts—an outcome that I myself believe to be inevitable in time—then the investigations into the question of the survival of human personality after death will be seen to have a much wider bearing than the resolution of that question, supremely important as it is. They will contribute also toward the development of radically new concepts about the nature of human personality.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Scientific research into the question of the survival of human personality after bodily death has been conducted for almost a century. I have reviewed this research, dividing it into three periods of activity that were not discretely separated, but nevertheless were characterized by different approaches and conceptions of the problem.

In the first period, investigators threw their nets widely and studied a variety of spontaneous experiences and quasiexperimental cases (those of mediumship) that suggested the influence of discarnate minds. A beginning was made in the delineation of recurrent features of experiences judged to be authentic and suggestive of survival. With increasing evidence of telepathy between living persons, it was seen that this process might account for the content of messages purportedly coming from discarnate persons; and that, combined with the dramatizing powers of the subconscious levels of the mind, it might also account for the emergence of plausible

pseudopersonalities in apparitions and mediumistic controls, these personalities having an appearance of independence, but being in fact the creations of the person or persons mainly concerned in experiencing them.

In the second period of investigation, most parapsychologists devoted their attention to other aspects of parapsychology. This shift appears to have been due partly to the development of the hypothesis of super-extrasensory perception, according to which unlimited paranormal powers of living persons suffice to account for all phenomena previously suggestive of the survival of human personality after physical death. During this period, however, considerable research on the question of survival was nevertheless conducted. Also during this period, renewed efforts were made to define the issues and to search for better discriminators between the paranormal powers of living persons and what should be expected if discarnate persons were able to communicate with living ones.

During the third period of research, investigators have attacked the question of survival along a rather broad front, and also have developed various new strategies. Earlier investigations have been extended, but with efforts at improving controls while preserving conditions satisfactory for the manifestation of discarnate personalities who may be able to communicate. Some recent investigators have accepted the proposition that at least a few persons may have unlimited powers of extrasensory perception, and they have turned their attention accordingly to limitations that may exist in a person's ability to use information that may, in principle, reach him by extrasensory perception. In this connection instances of the paranormal exhibition of skills, such as that of speaking a foreign language not normally learned, or other unusual behavior not normally learned, appear to have increasing possibilities for improving the evidence indicative of survival after death.

Before concluding, I must acknowledge having omitted discussion in this paper of

many important aspects of the question of human survival after death. In particular, I have not attempted any description of processes whereby a mind surviving death would persist in another, discarnate realm, and perhaps later become associated with a new physical body. Such concepts require extensive revisions of current ideas about the mind-brain relationship; and these are beyond the scope of the present paper, in which I have restricted myself to a review of the evidence supporting the idea of survival after death.

I should, however, return briefly to my earlier statement about the incompatibility between the phenomena I have discussed and the materialistic view of the nature of man to which most scientists subscribe. An awareness of this incompatibility has led most scientists who consider the matter to reject the evidence bearing on the question of survival after death on the grounds of its inauthenticity; the observations reported by parapsychologists, it is argued, when not due to outright fraud, require no further explanation than malobservation or faulty memory. This, however, is not the opinion of most persons who have had experience with these phenomena at first hand. They assert that, although some errors of observation and reporting have undoubtedly occurred, these are not fatal to the conclusion that the experiences suggestive of survival have really happened, in the main, as reported. Moreover, it can be pointed out that evidence indicative of survival comes from not just one type of experience, but from several: apparitions, out-of-the-body experiences, deathbed visions, certain kinds of mediumistic communications, and cases of the reincarnation type; and within each of these groups of experiences investigators have recorded not just one or two examples, but many, or—for some types—hundreds.

Those who appreciate the quantitative features of science may expect me to state how probable it is that human personality survives physical death. I would not presume—or wish—to attach a figure to this probability. Instead, I prefer only to record my conviction that the evidence of human survival after death is strong enough to

permit a belief in survival on the basis of the evidence. On the other hand, this evidence—imperfect as it remains—certainly does not compel such a belief. The only position incompatible with it is denial of its existence; for certainly there is much evidence suggesting human survival after death, and it is the duty of each person who becomes aware of it to decide what he shall believe from it.

The question of whether man survives after physical death is surely one of the most important that he can ask about himself. Yet it has so far received little attention and less support from scientists than many other questions of lesser importance. If results in this field of inquiry have been small and remain indecisive, that is because the laborers have been few. When more scientists understand the theoretical issues involved in studying the question of survival after death, and when more of us agree that, despite formidable difficulties, the question is amenable to empirical investigation, then we can expect to make much more rapid progress.

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