

Difficulties Confronting the Survival Hypothesis

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In our last issue¹ an attempt was made to summarize the main types of evidence for human survival. It was pointed out that the evidence—which ranges from apparitions coinciding with death, through simple mediumistic phenomena, to the cross correspondences and proxy sittings—cannot be regarded as final proof. If progress is to be made, it will be through squarely confronting the difficulties, not by seeking to escape them. The clarification of the difficulties as they appear today may be a helpful step toward an intelligent quest for more complete and convincing evidence.

The Biological Difficulty

From the viewpoint which the science of the last three hundred years has given us, it is clear that the electrical particles which we call "matter" have through eons of time grouped themselves in ever more complex ways; the more stable modes of grouping tend to endure, the unstable to disappear. It is in this way that the simplest living things appear to have arisen. No one, of course, knows the origin of life; but there appears to be no permanently unbridgeable gap between the organization and behavior of certain non-living particles and the organization and behavior of very simple unicellular organisms.

It used to be considered sufficient to say that if a material body possessed the capacities for growth, repair, and reproduction, it was alive. Particles of non-living matter may at times take on attributes very close to these three. Physical and chemical conditions determine the possibilities for growth, repair, and reproduction, as well as the transmutation from a unicellular to a more complex multicellular form, like a butterfly—or a man. Organic evolution, or

¹"An Outline of Survival Evidence," by Gardner Murphy, JOURNAL A.S.P.R., Vol. XXXIX, January, 1945, pp. 2-34.

development of types of living things, appears to be an instance of a constant process of variation in the modes of organization of physical particles. Some of these living modes of organization remain stable in spite of all sorts of threats; they defend themselves adequately, and may be able to encroach upon others. Their continued existence is ultimately a question of their adaptation to their environment.

The nervous system appears in the evolutionary process as a way of facilitating the conduction of impulses from one part of the organism to another, permitting the efficient coordination of movements which occur in response to environmental changes. The nervous system is a system which specializes in conducting impulses from one part of the body to another, and in the process of integrating different bodily activities.² Now the nervous system, becoming ever more complex in the service of such integration, ceases to be simply a basis for action, and becomes the basis for awareness of outer and inner changes, for if integration is to be adequate, there must be complex processes of *discrimination*. We cannot say categorically that no consciousness is directly associated with any other part of the body, and we cannot say why discrimination has to take the form which we call awareness; but we can say that throughout nature the degree of complexity of the nervous system is a major clue to the degree of complexity of awareness. To say that the brain is derived in the evolutionary process largely because it makes possible fine discriminations is a way of saying that finely diversified types of awareness are essential to diversified behavior. From the biological point of view, a major role of the nervous system, and of the brain in particular, is that of mediating such discriminations and adaptive responses.

Moreover, the *specific parts* of the brain mediate the specific qualities of experience. Let the surgeon expose part of the brain in a patient under local anesthesia, probing electrically here and there; he may elicit in the patient spe-

²*Integrative Action of the Nervous System*, by C. S. Sherrington, Scribner's, New York, 1906.

cific experiences of warmth, cold, touch, by stimulating those regions which have long (on anatomical grounds) been assigned to the mediation of these same experiences of warmth, cold, touch. Injury, moreover, to specific regions of the brain may obliterate the capacity to experience the corresponding warmth, cold, or touch sensations, just as injuries to the auditory or visual centers may cause disturbance, or even loss, of auditory or visual experience. (This specificity of localization is much finer in man than in the lower mammals.) It is difficult to think of any conscious process except in terms of the total dynamic adaptive process thus mediated by the nervous system. The biological point of view makes it difficult to think of *any aspect of awareness* as continuing independently of the very substratum which has given it its place in nature.

So far, we have considered simple impressions from the senses, the more elementary types of sensory awareness. It is sometimes held that the life of *feeling* is in a different category. But modern work shows clearly that feeling also has its physical basis; feeling depends in large part upon functions in the "old brain"—that part of the brain which is oldest in the evolutionary process, far older than the great cerebral hemispheres of the "new" brain, upon which man relies for his more complex mental processes. The life of feeling and emotion appears to depend upon centers which have not changed much in millions of years, centers which are activated in both man and animals under conditions of shock, on the one hand, and of strong positive instinctive responses on the other hand. Savage, rage-like behavior, for example, appears even when the cerebral hemispheres are no longer functional. It is true that the living body acts integrally, and that we have no right to speak of *isolated* feelings as located in isolated parts of the nervous system. But we can say that feeling is associated with the functioning of the old-brain centers, just as thought is associated with the centers in the "new" brain. In cases of encephalitis lethargica (epidemic sleeping sickness), for example, disorder in old-brain centers may result in dis-

order in the life of feeling. In certain types of brain pathology, the *loss* of feeling is reported. Even the manifestations of the *will*, so often regarded as transcending physiological interpretations, can be blotted out by organic disease. The argument from evolution and from anatomy is paralleled by the argument from individual development. In the newborn infant, personality is limited largely to temperamental individuality. As the brain undergoes a series of specific physiological changes, more and more new types of experiences become possible to the child; these new experiences constitute the mental predispositions which are said to make up the child's personality. Over a period of several years, the personality development follows from the appropriate brain development, and any impairment in such brain development, or any factor retarding it, is immediately reflected in the retardation of personality growth (in its intellectual or temperamental aspects, or both).

From the biological viewpoint, there is nothing to suggest that the conscious processes are any more *independent* of the body than are the circulatory, digestive, glandular, or other physiological processes. This is not a philosophical conclusion, but a conclusion directly suggested by much biological evidence. Nothing would be gained by beating the dead horse of nineteenth-century "materialism," a naïve and one-sided statement as to the one-way "dependence" of mental upon physical. Such *one-sided dependence* is not the issue at all. Mind and body are not things about which we have *ultimate* knowledge, nor can we say that one is the "cause" of the other. They might perhaps best be conceived as two aspects of one fundamental unity, the ultimate nature of which we are not likely to guess for a long time. But it is extremely difficult, from a biological point of view, to conceive what is meant by referring to personality as *independent* of the living organism—so as to survive beyond death—for the living organism is a psychophysical unity.

Over and above such general difficulties as these, there are difficulties in imagining what a "personal existence" would be like without a body. Efforts to define "astral" or

"etheric" bodies are evidently crude attempts to cope with this huge problem. The fact that bodies are the vehicles of personality, and that most people have no clear conception of personality except in such terms, is at least a factor in our perceiving apparitions of the deceased as objects in space, and in our hearing voices, or feeling touches, *as if a living organism were present*. We try in the same way to conceive a trans-mundane existence as made up of seeing, speaking, acting, hearing, feeling, willing—all of which, so far as we know, are the expressions of an intact physiological system. Let the reader try for a few minutes to imagine what his personal existence would be like if he were deprived of every device for making contact with his environment, except through the hypothetical use of continuous telepathy to and from other invisible minds. Unless this effort is made—and unless some sort of intelligible substitute for life as we know it is offered—the attempt to schematize the nature of post-mortem existence is likely to be a sorry product of wishful thinking. And just as human personality is a receiving station for physical and social events in the world surrounding us, so it is an action-center transmitting its characteristic directives to the things and persons which actualize its wants. A personality which neither made contact with an environment nor effected changes in that environment would be a personality only in a very limited sense of the term.

The Cultural Difficulty

Along with this biological argument comes the problem of our dependence upon our heritage, our culture. We owe a very large share of what we are to the fact that we were born, grew up, lived our lives in a specific period and place. Our personalities are in large measure patterns of response to a given social environment. We are twentieth century Americans; not only our ideas, but our deeper traits, our attitudes, what we hold dear, have been largely determined by our surroundings, our upbringing, and our contact with other specific individuals who likewise have their specific

cultural backgrounds. If beyond the human personalities which we know, shaped by these known biological and social forces, there is some kernel of spiritual reality which altogether transcends and outlasts the physical organism and the specific conditions of time and place—something which is guided (as by the Karma of Hinduism) into new areas of experience in which it is to be clothed with a new external personality—it could still hardly be called a human personality. What we mean by survival is not this impersonal principle, but the habits, thoughts, memories, feelings, impulses, interests, which express us as men and women of a particular period and social group. If, as we exist after death, we are interchangeable with the personalities—the memories, thoughts, interests—of Iroquois Indians or pre-historic Chinese, or are without any definite memories or interests at all, this is personal survival only by a sort of play upon words. Yet there are difficulties in believing that that which owes its personal existence to a specific group of conditions, limited in time and space, a thing which belongs to the United States in the twentieth century, could be crystallized and maintained in the functions of a personal existence in an utterly different context.

This argument is not offered as one independent of the biological argument, nor is it laid down as a dogma to be defended. It is of a theoretical type, and the degree of cogency to be assigned it will vary with the individual reader. But it is, I believe, an extremely serious difficulty—a difficulty which must be met with facts and with logic, not simply with protest. It is an aspect of the general proposition that personality as we know it is an expression of a particular group of relationships realized but once in the course of life on this planet. Could it be transferred to utterly different circumstances? And if it were so transferred, would it still be the personality which we know?

Survival Evidence is Colored by the Folklore of our Era

Primitive man has, in general, believed naively in survival; this belief derives in part from the fact that the

personalities of the recently dead are still very real to him, partly from the fact that his dreams of them make him feel that somehow they must still be alive. Apparitions of the deceased were often taken, as they are today, as full-fledged expressions of surviving personalities. This primitive attitude toward the deceased was in general (but with some exceptions) accepted about the Mediterranean basin until the age of Greco-Roman skepticism, as expressed in Aristotle and Cicero.

These two attitudes, of belief and of skepticism, have vied with one another in European thought ever since, with religion insisting upon survival, yet as a rule pointing to ancient rather than to contemporary evidence. With the eighteenth century, the notion of *direct* evidence, as contrasted with traditional evidence, such as that of the New Testament, began to be emphasized. The Cocklane ghost was not to be laughed at; Swedenborg and other visionaries were to be heard, their evidence weighed. We have humorous glimpses of eighteenth century thought in *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Benjamin Franklin tells of the invasion of his sleeping body by the spirit of his competitor, the almanac-maker Thomas Leeds, and of the automatic writing which his hand carried out in consequence. There were many spiritistic manifestations in the first half of the nineteenth century, when organized spiritualism, as a way of making contact between the two worlds, was established.

Now, as Professor E. R. Dodds has emphasized,³ paranormal phenomena have been reported for some thousands of years; people asleep or in trance, or under the influence of drugs or fumes, together with a smaller number of people in a state of apparently normal consciousness, have appeared to be invaded by intelligences which desire to communicate. The kinds of intelligence which appear to communicate seem to depend largely upon the expectations of the social group. Often the purporting communicators through special sensitives have been nature spirits,

³"Why I do not Believe in Survival," by Professor E. R. Dodds, *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. XLII (1934), pp. 147-172.

demons, devils, angels, gods, and goddesses. The vast array of psychical phenomena—telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, etc.—has been manifest through recorded history as an aspect of special mental conditions which suggests to observers that forces beyond the individual are at work, but often with no thought of marshaling evidence for survival. Under the special cultural—especially the scientific—conditions of the last century, as expressed by the work of societies for psychical research, mediums have been constrained to use the paranormal gift primarily for securing messages from deceased human beings; their task is to give survival evidence.

Dissociation and Histrionic Skill

Whenever, over the face of the earth, communication with invisible forces is attempted, there is some cultural preparation for the execution of the task of mediation. The child may show the tendency to fall into trance, or may go to an adept to learn the art of "concentration." Self-induced states of passivity, in which automatic writing, speaking, and posturing occur are more or less alike everywhere. One gives oneself the suggestion, throughout the training period, that one will serve as mediator for a given divinity or demon; and with few exceptions the primitive or the advanced practitioner receives in some measure the sort of unseen power upon which he awaits. The manifestations carry to onlookers the sense of verisimilitude; one recognizes the characteristic earmarks of the divinity or demon, exactly as the sitter in a spiritualistic circle recognizes those earmarks which make a convincing demonstration of personal continuity. The ability to portray that which has been fervently awaited is a skill which is apparently enhanced rather than reduced by the dissociated or sleep-like state which has been developed by training. The very fact that one loses one's alert, waking personality makes it easier for that which remains of the self to cast itself in the roles assigned by the unseen powers.

We reach, then, as a basis of operations, the conception

that the entranced personality gives itself to the task of bringing forth and making real the personalities who are desired as communicators. The important thing is to play the role well. Often the sensitive refers to personalities which never existed, as in the case of "Adam Bede."⁴ George Eliot, purporting to communicate directly through the entranced Mrs. Piper, gave elaborate descriptions of her life in Heaven. On one occasion the renowned authoress said to the experimenter, Richard Hodgson: "I saw him (Robert Burns) in the same building with the before mentioned spirits . . . Shelley and Chaucer, the original and only writer of Canterbury tales . . . I also saw the original Adam Bede. I also met Homer our dear old Greek poet, and I stopped and spoke with each one of them." More important, however, are those cases in which fictitious personalities purport to communicate directly. The fabulous "Bessie Beals," demanded by Stanley Hall and Amy Tanner in their series with Mrs. Piper, will serve as an example.⁵ Mrs. Sidgwick summarizes the case as follows (*op. cit.*, pp. 177-178):

We are not, however, limited to inference from the failure of communicators for evidence that they are sometimes not what they profess to be, for Dr. Stanley Hall in 1909 took a short cut to positive evidence by deceiving the control Hodgson [through Mrs. Piper] and asking for a niece, Bessie Beals, who had never existed, but who was nevertheless produced at several sittings. She said little at first, but communicated more fully by the third sitting, and connected specific memories with the sitter—mainly, though not entirely, such as might be suggested by his statements and questions. When in the end Dr. Hall told Hodgson that he (Hall) had been deceiving him, and that there was no such person as Bessie Beals, Hodgson maintained her reality. The following is a report of the conversation (*Studies in Spiritism*, p. 254):

Dr. Hall: Well, what do you say to this, Hodgson? I asked you to call Bessie Beals, and there is no such person. How do you explain that?

Hodgson: Bessie Beals is here, and not the—

⁴"A Contribution to the Study of the Psychology of Mrs. Piper's Trance Phenomena," by Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. XXVIII (1915). Cf. especially p. 117.

⁵*Studies in Spiritism*, by Amy E. Tanner, Ph.D. Introduction by G. Stanley Hall. D. Appleton and Company, New York, 1910.

Note by Miss Tanner: At this point we laughed and I made some remark to the effect that that was just what we had said Hodgson would do, and the hand continued thus:

Hodgson: I know a Bessie Beals. Her mother asked about her before. Mother asked about her before.

Dr. Hall: I don't know about that, Hodgson. Bessie Beals is a pure fiction.

Hodgson: I refer to a lady who asked me the same thing and the same name.

Dr. Hall: Guess you are wrong about that, Hodgson.

Hodgson: Yes, I am mistaken in her. I am mistaken. Her name was not Bessie, but Jessie Beals.

We can only say about this explanation that it is not plausible . . . Dr. Hall might accidentally have hit on the name of a previous communicator, but it is very unlikely that this communicator would have had memories appropriate to Dr. Hall's fictions and have admitted him as her uncle.

The trance consciousness, then, is as adept in its myth-making fantasy as it is in bringing forward those who have recently died; among the throng of invisible entities who wait to make themselves known, there is nothing to permit the dominant communicator, or control, to distinguish which are authentic and which are imaginary. The purporting Hodgson, who gives on the whole a rather good evidential picture of himself, vouches for the non-existent Bessie Beals.

The Paranormal Gifts of the Sensitive

How, then, is it that such an abundance of evidential communications have in fact been given? In the preceding paper we stressed the fact that much good material of this sort does exist, a great deal of which is not to be explained in terms of telepathy from those present at the sitting. To give an answer which is completely fair, it is important, I think, to give special heed to the various trance communications purporting to come from the deceased when in point of fact the alleged communicator is alive at the time. A very good case of this sort, containing much evidential material, was reported by S. G. Soal.⁶

⁶"A Report on Some Communications received through Mrs. Blanche Cooper," by S. G. Soal, *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. XXXV (1925), pp. 471-594.

In 1922, during the course of Mr. Soal's series of sittings with Mrs. Blanche Cooper, an English direct-voice medium, a "voice well articulated and extraordinarily clear and strong began to speak," and gave the name Gordon Davis. Mr. Soal had known a boy by that name many years before, but had long since lost touch with him. He had heard a rumor that Davis had been killed in the first World War. During the course of two sittings, "Gordon Davis" referred to certain incidents known by the sitter to be true; for example, that he had lived in a place called Roch— (Rochdale), and that he had last seen Mr. Soal on a train. The communicator also gave evidential material not known at the time to the sitter; for example, that he had a wife and one son. Moreover, Davis described in detail a house and its furnishings. Three years later, in 1925, Mr. Soal learned that Mr. Davis was alive and well. He visited him and found him living in a house which fulfilled in a striking way the description given in the sittings. Mr. Davis had not moved into this house until nearly a year after the communications were given. Mr. Soal summarizes by saying, "In the case under consideration the supernormal knowledge shown is of a high order. Not only is there penetration into the past of the 'communicator,' but there are considerable indications that the future was also anticipated."

In spite of doubts which we believe Mr. Soal himself later cast upon the "Gordon Davis" case, it is very hard to accept the theory that "unconscious whispering," or any other normal means of communication, could have given the wealth of accurate detail which was forthcoming in relation to Mr. Soal's old friend.

A less well-known but equally striking case was reported twenty years ago by Canon Douglas.⁷ He had a French chauffeur named Réallier who, at the outbreak of the first World War, returned to France to enter the army. Canon Douglas heard from his chauffeur after this only at long intervals. During a sitting with Mrs. Effie Halsey (Mrs. Vernon) in this country, Réallier appeared as communicator, first giving his name as Ravallier, then correctly as Réallier. A deceased nephew of Canon Douglas', whose name was also correctly given, purported to be "helping" the chauffeur to communicate. A profusion of good evi-

⁷*Unpopular Review*, January-March, 1919. See also *JOURNAL A.S.P.R.*, Vol. XIII, 1919, pp. 130-136, 281-283, and 492-494.

dential material was given, some of which the sitter knew at the time to be true. Other details were unknown to him, but were corroborated later. In this category can be placed a description of a "toolchest in disgraceful disorder, with several of the tools broken and useless," and a description of an expedition to Salonika. But, as it turned out, the chauffeur was alive; he was at no time near the point of death nor in a critical condition.

It seems that in such cases as these, the histrionic powers of the medium are called forth, and appropriate material is apparently picked up telepathically. Now we have already seen that the capacity to pick up needed material is highly developed in good sensitives; in fact, we cited evidence that such appropriate material *can* be "filched" from the minds of both present and distant living people.⁸ If it be regarded as remarkable that the medium knows how and where to turn for material to complete the picture of the communicator, evidence for this capacity lies directly in these cases of Soal's and Canon Douglas'. Whatever difficulties we may have with an interpretation, the power is clearly there. The same sort of ability to go out and get specific needed material is witnessed in good psychometric studies; for example, in those reported by Pagenstecher⁹ and W. F. Prince,¹⁰ and those more recently given us by Hettinger in England.¹¹

This specific capacity is often deemed incredible even by those who admit the evidence for experimental telepathy. Just why it should be incredible is not clear. After all, we should not be misled by our tendency to form an image of physical space in which the poor sensitive wanders, like Diogenes with his lantern, trying to find—among two billion human beings—a mind possessing the necessary in-

⁸"An Outline of Survival Evidence." Cf. especially pp. 11-12.

⁹"Past Events Seership: A Study in Psychometry," by G. Pagenstecher, *Proc. A.S.P.R.*, Vol. XVI, January, 1922, pp. 1-136.

¹⁰"Studies in Psychometry," by W. F. Prince, *Proc. A.S.P.R.*, Vol. XVIII, 1924, pp. 178-352.

¹¹*The Ultra-Perceptive Faculty, and Exploring the Ultra-Perceptive Faculty*, by J. Hettinger, Rider and Co., London, 1940 and 1941.

formation. Rather, it appears that space is utterly irrelevant to the issue; the mind makes contact with that which is *relevant to its purpose*. If a cluster of ideas relevant to a given central theme exists, it appears reasonable to believe (in line with Carington's¹² conception, for example) that ideas which are related tend to function as a unit.

It must again be stressed, lest the point be regarded as sheerly hypothetical, that we have *direct evidence* that this process of filching and sifting among the minds of the living does actually occur. A curious case illustrating the complexity of the process is related by Lily Dougall in her essay "The Good and Evil in Spiritualism."¹³ Because this case is not generally known, I shall quote it in full:

"My friend, whom we will call Miss A, received a visit from an acquaintance we will call Mrs. B. The mind of Miss A was at the time absorbed by the details of some striking events which had lately occurred in her own circle, but she did not mention these events to Mrs. B, who was not an intimate friend, and was not personally concerned in them. In the course of conversation, Mrs. B said she was on her way to keep an appointment with a visualizing medium . . . Mrs. B took her leave, but in a short time unexpectedly called again on her way home, to tell Miss A that her visit to the medium this time had been disappointing and useless. The medium had had and described a series of visions, but nothing in them was recognized by Mrs. B, and neither she nor the medium could make any sense out of the visions. Out of politeness, Miss A enquired their nature, and was amazed when Mrs. B's recital set forth with considerable detail the events which had absorbed her own mind during Mrs. B's visit before she went on to the seance. One curious detail was added: the visions had been ushered into the medium's plane of vision by the figure of a Chinaman in fine apparel. Now, the odd thing was, that that very morning Miss A had happened to pass the Chinese Embassy in London, and had seen two gorgeously attired Chinamen coming down the steps, whose dress had greatly pleased her artistic sense. These Chinamen, had of course, nothing to do with the other events over which in those days her mind was brooding."

¹²"Experiments on the Paranormal Cognition of Drawings, IV," by Whately Carington, *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. XLVII (1944), pp. 155-228. Cf. especially the section *A Theory of Paranormal Cognition and Allied Phenomena*. We also refer the reader to M. P. Reeves's Review of the Carington theory, pp. 95-112, this issue.

¹³From the book *Immortality: An Essay in Discovery*, by B. H. Streeter and others, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1917.

Shortly after the publication of Miss Dougall's essay, Mrs. Sidgwick indicated her wish to hear more details of the case. Miss A (who turned out to be a lady well known to Mrs. Sidgwick) thereupon communicated some further information in correspondence with Mrs. Sidgwick.¹⁴ One striking incident concerned the medium's description of a place of worship in which she saw four unusual pillars. Miss A was at the time of the sitting in great grief because of the death of a close relative. The funeral service of this relative had taken place in a building with a roof supported by huge and very unusual pillars. During the service four of these pillars had been in Miss A's field of vision, and she stated that they had made a curiously strong impression on her mind. This, of course, was quite unknown to her acquaintance, Mrs. B, at the time she took the sitting.

In good cases of crystal vision and of "traveling clairvoyance," the sensitive may also make contact not only with the contents of minds directly concerned with the process of communication, but also with minds rather remotely linked with those present. An example of crystal vision illustrating this process is given by Andrew Lang:¹⁵

The percipient, Miss Angus, looked into the crystal ball for a gentleman, Mr. N., with whom she was only slightly acquainted. Mr. N. concentrated upon a young lady, unknown to Miss Angus, to whom he had been introduced at a dance. Miss Angus thereupon described a room, not a ballroom, in which she saw a young girl with brown hair drawn back from her forehead. The girl was either reading or writing letters under a bright light in an unshaded glass globe. She was wearing a highnecked white blouse. The description of the features and coloring of the girl tallied with Mr. N.'s recollection, but he had only seen her once, and then in ball dress. Shortly after, however, Mr. N. met this young lady again, and she corroborated the details of the crystal vision. At the moment Miss Angus was scrying, the girl, attired in a highnecked white blouse, had been writing letters under an incandescent gas-lamp with an unshaded glass globe.

We do not, of course, know all that is involved in such processes, but we can say that, starting from the associations in the minds of those present, it is possible for a sensitive to imagine himself (or herself) to be at the place

¹⁴*Journal S.P.R.*, July, 1918, pp. 209-211.

¹⁵*The Making of Religion*, by Andrew Lang, 2nd ed., London, 1900, p. 95.

of which someone present is thinking, and thereby make contact with the minds of persons at that distant point, seeing things as they are seen by them, even if these latter persons are not known to the sensitive.

But the story does not stop here. The entranced sensitive, intent upon a realistic and complete portrayal of the deceased, may at the same time be the vehicle of *precognitive* powers, as in the newspaper tests of Drayton Thomas¹⁶ referred to in the earlier paper. We simply do not know whether these powers (which in the newspaper tests purport to be exercised by the deceased) are in fact exercised by the deceased, by the sensitive, or by some process of interaction between the two. But we do know from an abundance of evidence that the living sometimes exhibit *precognitive* powers, and the "law of parsimony," which requires that a complex interpretation be ruled out whenever one making fewer assumptions is feasible, would perhaps make it more appropriate to attribute such powers to the sensitive until such a time as survival may be established.

It is likely that along with such *precognitive* powers there are *retrocognitive* powers. Myers defines retrocognition as "supernormally acquired knowledge of the past, extending back beyond the reach of our ordinary memory."¹⁷ It is strange that so much attention has been given to *precognition* and so little to *retrocognition*, though indeed some spontaneous cases which seem to indicate *retrocognition* do exist.¹⁸ But if *retrocognition* be admitted, a sensitive's capacity to read off directly the thoughts and feelings of an earlier period would enormously complicate our problem. It is, in fact, very difficult to see how good evidential com-

¹⁶*Some New Evidence for Human Survival*, by C. D. Thomas, W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., Glasgow, 1922.

¹⁷*Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, by F. W. H. Myers, Longmans, Green, and Co., New York and London, 1903. It should perhaps, however, be pointed out that Myers further says, in connection with *retrocognition*, "But we can hardly conceive the Past revived, save in some mind which has directly observed it"—Vol. II, p. 262.

¹⁸See, for example, *Human Personality*, Vol. I, pp. 592-593, and the little book *An Adventure* (Macmillan's, 1911), by Miss Moberley and Miss Jourdain. Here the authors describe how on a number of occasions in the twentieth century they seemed to see the Gardens of Versailles as they were in the 1780's.

munications (such as we have from the purporting Myers, for example) can be properly studied in terms of hypothetical telepathy from Mrs. Verrall and other living classical scholars while at the same time neglecting the possibility that the material is derived retrocognitively from the Myers mind of the years before his death.

The Argument from Intention

Now it is perfectly true that this whole argument overlooks the element of intention, activity, purpose, or downright "invasion" of the sensitive's consciousness by what appears to be the integrated surviving personality of the communicator. Speaking only for myself, this argument from organized personal activity in its full purposive character would seem to be the strongest single argument offered by the whole range of survival evidence. The difficulty with the argument, however, if it pretends to be *final* and *convincing* rather than merely *suggestive*, is that the communications cited above from demons, deities, characters in fiction, and sheer mythological creations, also have something of this purposive character. Is it not possible that the purpose, which is already intense enough on the part of the sitter, reaches a level of passionate intensity in the subtle and sensitive response of the medium? The medium is completely devoted to the purpose in hand (for normal personal consciousness is gone); the trance personalities probably believe themselves at the time to be the entities desired, and respond with energy to the demand to make themselves known.

In the case of apparitions, too, we have abundant evidence of the role of *motivation* on the part of the *percipient*. Tyrrell¹⁹ has attempted, very properly, to show a deep-level interaction between the dynamics of agent and percipient, and we have agreed as to the legitimacy of this effort. But the thought and intention of the agent are seldom inferable

¹⁹ *Apparitions: being the seventh Frederic W. H. Myers Memorial Lecture*, by G. N. M. Tyrrell, Society for Psychical Research, London, 1942.

with certainty, while those of the percipient are often crystal-clear. There are, indeed, a number of indications that apparitions are cast in the mold of the percipient's mind, and express *his* tendencies. In a case cited in the earlier paper, was it, in fact, the *intention* of a girl who had died many years before to reveal herself to her brother with a long disagreeable scratch upon her face?²⁰ The incident was dramatic and served to give both the mother and the brother a sense of real contact with the other world, since the mother had in fact unintentionally made such a scratch upon her daughter's face when preparing the body for burial. Are we not dealing either with the mother's or with the brother's point of view—with their fears and hopes—or with some interaction of these two, rather than with any real spontaneous portrayal of herself on the part of the girl? Why not say in all such cases that the unconscious of the percipient actively searches through past, present, and future for material appropriate to its needs, and when successful in making paranormal contact achieves the result in the form of an evidential hallucination?

This is, indeed, an exact parallel to what we have already suggested regarding mediumship. We have seen that the deep-level wants of the sensitive, induced in response to the deep-level wants of the sitter, reach out into relevant psychological material, bringing it together in organized form, and presenting it in the form of a purporting communicator. Is there a different problem involved when, instead of a medium, we have an ordinary percipient, temporarily endowed with paranormal gifts, who in the same way makes survival evidence out of the paranormal contacts which he is capable of achieving?

It should be added that in the case of both apparitions and mediumistic communications the manifestations are anchored in the lives of the living, and that as living sources of information disappear, the manifestations disappear. The manner in which the Myers communications, in their more

²⁰ *Human Personality*, Vol. II, pp. 27-30.

striking form, commenced with Mrs. Holland's²¹ reading of *Human Personality* is paralleled by the waning of the Myers communications as most of the automatists were removed, one by one, by death. The Myers communications, as well as the communications from Dr. Verrall, became much less impressive after the death of Mrs. Verrall. There were, of course, enough automatists left to make some continuation of cross correspondences possible (indeed, the retrocognitive factors suggested above might account for this). But whatever it is that creates the need for contact between the living and the dead appears to fade as the specific living individuals involved are themselves removed from the scene. From this point of view, the sources of evidential material in the minds of the living are removed. It may, of course, be argued that this is because the deceased have passed on to some other plane from which they cannot or do not wish to reach back. But the point is very difficult to insist upon in view of the fact that among the very best of mediumistic controls, a fair number date their earthly existence back to periods many decades removed from our own. Mrs. Leonard's Feda, for example, is purported to have died in India a century ago.

It must be granted, despite all, that weight should be assigned to instances in which the surviving personality appears to exert its will, appears to *invade* the experience of the living, surprises them, forces them to recognize it. The only way to deal with this issue fairly is to ask whether we know the limitations imposed upon the desires of the living to make contact with their deceased loved ones, and at the same time to ask what we know regarding the conscious or unconscious wishes of those who say that an apparition which they experienced was unexpected or unwanted. To refer to still another case quoted in the earlier paper, is it accidental that the son who parapsychically learned of his father's latest will was the *beneficiary* of this will?²²

²¹"On the Automatic Writing of Mrs. Holland," by Alice Johnson, *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. XXI (1907-1909), pp. 166-391.

²²The "Chaffin Will Case." *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. XXXVI (1926-1928), pp. 517-524.

And we are surely in no position today to say naively that all wishes stand at the surface of the mind, to be easily caught and described.

We do know, moreover, that when ordinary (non-evidential) hallucinations or fantasies of distant loved ones are experienced, these loved ones are cast into an active role. They are not merely seen; they may speak and reach out. Those who experience such non-evidential hallucinations are able, by virtue of their need, to assign apparent initiative to the images or hallucinations which appear; in the same way the living percipient may supply the *activity* and *initiative* of evidential apparitions.

This is probably not an altogether fair answer to the argument from *purpose*. For apparitions (and mediumistic utterances) often come unexpectedly rather than as predictable responses to the thoughts of the living. But before we reach a conclusion regarding the strength of the evidence from apparitions, we should remember that there exist two classes of apparitions which make it very difficult to maintain that the apparition must be a "representation" of a deceased personality: First, there are apparitions of the percipient's own self, experienced while wide awake and in good light. The percipient sees himself as an external entity, exactly as he would see another person. He is still in his own body; the world of space about him is unaltered; but there, some feet from him, is his double. If the apparition is in a sense a portrayal of personality, and if the percipient is *himself* a personality, can this double be regarded as another personality? Apparitions of the self seem to suggest complex hallucinatory processes arising from unconscious needs, and from very special cerebral and optical conditions, all favorably realized at one moment. Especially interesting here is the celebrated instance of Goethe's seeing himself as he proved to be years later.²³ Goethe wrote in his *Dichtung und Wahrheit* as follows:

²³Quoted by W. F. Prince in his volume, *Noted Witnesses for Psychic Occurrences*, Boston Society for Psychic Research, 1928, p. 136.

I now rode on horseback over the footpath to Drusenheim, when one of the strangest experiences befell me. Not with the eyes of the body, but with those of the spirit, I saw myself on horseback coming toward me on the same path dressed in a suit such as I had never worn, pale gray with some gold. As soon as I had shaken myself out of this reverie the form vanished. It is strange, however, that I found myself returning on the same path eight years afterwards to visit Fredericka once more and that I then wore the suit I had dreamt of, and this was not by design but by chance.

Secondly, there are instances in which the apparition is that of an animal, the entire experience being similar to those which we include among phantasms of the dead. A typical case was included by W. F. Prince in *Human Experiences*.²⁴ A woman lying ill in the hospital saw her dog come up to her bed, and felt his wet nose thrust into the palm of her hand. She particularly noticed that he was dripping with water. She also heard him whine before he disappeared. Believing that the dog had been brought to the hospital by a friend, she called an orderly to come and take charge of him. No dog, of course, was to be found anywhere in her room. Later her husband told her that the dog had been drowned at about the same hour sixteen miles away from the hospital.

It is, of course, entirely possible that something in animal nature survives bodily death; indeed, that the entire canine personality survives and projects itself upon the screen of our world. But it should at least be noted that our willingness to consider the possibility of human survival is rooted largely in our conception of the richness of the intellectual powers, and of the moral, social, and esthetic gifts of mankind, or, on the other hand, in our belief in a spiritual principle or a soul; and that neither basis for a belief in animal survival rings true. It is true that we love our pets and want them to survive, and that animal apparitions are for the most part those of animals close to man. But this argument, if it has any cogency at all, suggests that it is the deep wish of man rather than something in the animal

²⁴*Bulletin B.S.P.R.*, September, 1931, p. 120.

personality as such that gives rise to the apparitions. Psychic experiences of various sorts exist in fair number only in the case of those animals with whom individual human beings have an emotional tie: namely, dogs, cats, and horses.

So, while the case from intention, whether in apparitions or in mediumistic communications, remains strong, we must admit that we know very little about the limits of what may be achieved in the way of a portrayal of the deceased through the strong motivation of the percipient (or special sensitive), expressing itself in a combination of histrionic and of paranormal capacities.

Inconsistencies in the Case for Survival

Up to this point we have simply raised questions regarding the evidence. We have sketched some of the reasons why the evidence cannot today be viewed as adequate and complete. There is, however, another approach. We must ask whether the evidence, aside from its incompleteness, hangs together in such a way as to make a reasonable or consistent whole. We are concerned in this section not with the strength of the evidence, but with its logical coherence.

First among the questions which should be asked is the question whether the personalities which appear in the form of phantasms or communicators actually think, talk, behave in harmony with the known traits of the personalities which they purport to represent. This point comes out with great force when one turns to the communicators through mediums. Many of those appearing through a good sensitive—even those bringing good evidence of their survival—seem to be cast in the same general mold; they are often too much alike, and think and talk too much like the medium, to convince the general observer of their autonomy.²⁵ There is not only the expected juvenility, not to say infantilism, of the child guides, and of the American

²⁵Whately Carington has directed much effort to show by experiment the degree of similarity between the different communicators through a single sensitive. But the whole question of the degree of independence of communicators and controls is still highly obscure. (See *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vols. XLII, pp. 173ff, XLIII, pp. 319ff, XLIV, pp. 189ff, and XLV, pp. 223ff.)

Indian and other primitive controls who impart to many sittings a certain lightheadedness shared by other communicators; there is a love of vague philosophizing of the uplift type, even when there is the avowed intention to stick to business. This lack of solidity is not confined to the sittings of the third-class sensitive. There can be two opinions about the question whether the communicating Myers in the cross correspondences is actually at the intellectual level of the Myers who wrote *Human Personality*, but there can be no two opinions about the question whether the Hodgson control through Mrs. Piper is at the intellectual level of Richard Hodgson as known to his research associates. We have already seen, in the case of "Bessie Beals" referred to above, the pitiful evasions put forward by the Hodgson personality when he is told that Bessie Beals never existed. And William James,²⁶ after studying sixty-nine sittings in which Hodgson professed to appear, reports similar vacuities and vacillations on the part of the Hodgson personality. This moral flabbiness, this willingness to have things both ways—to make statements and then wriggle out of them—creates for the sitter a certain fetid atmosphere in which serious thinking is difficult. It does not do any good to say that there is of necessity some "confusion" in such messages, or to say that the mind of the sensitive "colors" the material coming through. The trouble goes deeper. The dissociated mind is likely to be an irresponsible mind—nearly as much so in the case of a great sensitive as in the case of the ordinary ouija-board writer or automatist with pencil or planchette. And it is only the dissociated mental processes with which we *directly* deal; what lies behind is a matter of inference, in which one man will differ from another.

It was just this sort of thing which led Mrs. Sidgwick²⁷

²⁶"Report on Mrs. Piper's Hodgson-Control," by Professor William James, *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. XXIII (1909), pp. 2-121.

²⁷"A Contribution to the Study of the Psychology of Mrs. Piper's Trance Phenomena," *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. XXVIII (1915). Cf. especially pp. 5-7. And see also Mrs. Sidgwick's earlier paper, "Discussion of the Trance Phenomena of Mrs. Piper," *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. XV (1900-1901), pp. 16-38.

to the view that while in Mrs. Piper's trance the deceased perhaps influence the sensitive *telepathically*, the controls and communicators themselves constitute simply a series of secondary personalities. This would mean that we are not communicating *directly* with the deceased, and that the trance personalities simply draw upon the minds of the deceased (or are perhaps actually impressed by their minds). But if we resort to indirection of this sort, reasonable as this may be, we need be much less apologetic about the indirection assumed by the various hypotheses regarding telepathy from distant living persons.

Still another type of difficulty appears in the "Ear of Dionysius"²⁸ case—a discrepancy between personal traits as known and personal traits actually exhibited in the process of communicating. It will be recalled that the purpose of this splendid case was to transmit to the unsuspecting sitter a completely worked out unitary message which could not be attributed to any form of telepathy among the living, nor to any other normal source. The link which connected the "one eye" with the "one ear" could be found only in rather obscure works on the Greek poets. But, in point of fact, when the first fragments of the message had been given, the whole case was dropped for over a year. Within such a span of time the reading of the sitter (Mrs. Verrall), and that of the other classicists in the group, could of course not be foreseen and controlled, and any purpose such as was originally avowed was certain to be jeopardized. It is fortunately true that there is no evidence that the classicists *did* read during this interval any material which would serve as a basis for the later messages. The point we are making is quite different; it is to the effect that while many things in the messages are characteristic of Verrall and Butcher, it is *not* in the least characteristic of intelligent communicators, carrying out a plan, to make a preliminary approach, and then to drop the whole thing and turn to

²⁸"The Ear of Dionysius: Further Scripts affording Evidence of Personal Survival," by the Right Hon. Gerald W. Balfour, *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. XXIX (1916-1918), pp. 197-286.

other matters until new conditions are likely to endanger the whole test. And it does not get us far to say that *time* for the deceased may be different from what it is for us, for they have ostensibly adapted themselves, in order to give evidence, to our time and to our conditions. The more honest thing would be to say that the episode shows some of that dreaminess, vagueness—lack of tight, orderly, disciplined thinking—which characterizes automatism or dissociated processes generally. Thus not only do the *contents* of the communications frequently suggest a source in the minds of the living, but the very *character traits* of the communicators are sometimes unlike those which we should expect. This is not to deny that such cases as the "Ear of Dionysius" remain profoundly impressive as survival evidence, even in the midst of quandary as to the psychological contradictions involved.

What Survives?

Suppose we should agree that none of the objections raised can remove the cogency of the survival evidence, or seriously disturb the form in which it is presented; the question would still remain whether the thing within us which survives is in fact a personality in the sense in which we ordinarily use the term. We briefly touched upon this question when discussing the cultural determination of personality traits; here we face it more directly in terms of the data of psychical research. Quite aside from the question of immortality (which cannot even be broached as a problem for present-day science, since very short spans of existence beyond bodily death are all that we can study), any demonstration of the survival of personality would have to show that all the essentials are in fact capable of enduring and remaining together. A memory, by itself, is not a personality, nor is a feeling, nor an act of will, however poignant and intense such experiences may be. Even if the cross correspondences and the proxy cases be taken as making very probable the continuation beyond death of *certain elements of individuality*, it is possible that these,

like iron filings around a magnet, are brought into function by virtue of the needs of the living, these memories or purposes having a non-spatial and non-temporal existence. Here again, the doctrine suggested as an hypothesis is close to that of Carington (see reference 12), but it is closer still to a doctrine suggested by H. H. Price, as stated in his Presidential Address to the Society for Psychical Research.²⁹ Hauntings, he suggests, might arise from fragmentary psychological processes transcending the operation of the percipient's mind, but associated with his perception of particular buildings or places. In the same way, it is quite possible that the classical memories associated with Myers or Verrall come naturally into place when a Myers-like or Verrall-like personality is induced in the trance consciousness.

It might be better to state all this in terms of some such analogy as the following: Every physical activity makes an impression upon the matrix or field in which it occurs. For a time after a stone is dropped into the water, the orderly commotion of concentric spreading rings can be seen, and after an electric current is passed through a wire, the induced current set up around the wire takes the form of an electromagnetic wave propagated in all directions. It is quite possible that the processes of the brain initiate changes in some sort of matrix of which we have no direct knowledge, and that these changes survive in the matrix for some time, regardless of the continuation or discontinuation of the original physiological activity. Contact with these modifications of the matrix would constitute survival evidence in the strict sense, but might at the same time leave us completely noncommittal as to whether the entity that survives is really a whole personality, and of course as to the length of time during which such survival might continue.

Summary

We have tried to show that it is difficult to envisage, in

²⁹"Haunting and the 'Psychic Ether' Hypothesis; with some Preliminary Reflections on the Present Condition and Possible Future of Psychical Research," by H. H. Price, *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. XLV (1938-1939), pp. 307-343.

the light of biology, any way in which personality could function without a living organism. In particular, we have tried to show that in terms of evolution and individual development, personality develops step by step with the development of the nervous system. In the case of the adult, normal personality is an aspect of normal bodily make-up, abnormal or defective personality an aspect of abnormal or defective bodily processes. Human personality is not simply a "stream of consciousness"; it is also an action pattern, and both consciousness and action are seated in the psychophysical unity of the organism, the chief integrating center being the brain.

We expressed the suspicion that the expectations of the living may throw paranormal phenomena into the form of survival evidence, just as in other eras cultural demands threw the phenomena into the form of communications from demons or other non-human spirits. In line with this interpretation, we have stressed the histrionic skill of the dissociated or trance states through which an adequate representation of known personalities is achieved. If it be asked whether the rich survival evidences already existing, such as those briefly cited in the earlier paper, do not show the insufficiency of such interpretations, the reply is that extraordinary paranormal powers are actually the gift of certain sensitives. It is by no means an hypothesis—rather it is a definitely demonstrated actuality—that the trance consciousness may sweep about like an intelligently directed searchlight, directing itself to items needed to complete an adequate simulation of the deceased. It was, moreover, suggested that retrocognitive contact with personalities now deceased may well be among the powers exercised.

From this point, the argument turned to the constantly stressed question whether there is not in the communications, or in the apparitions, abundant evidence of spontaneity and initiative. It often appears that the deceased demand to make contact with the living. Granting the full force of this argument, as it appears, for example, in the Chaffin Will Case (reference 22), the counter-question has

been raised: Cannot the great need and the highly developed skill of the living create just such images and just such communications as are required? A complex and creative dream does neither much better nor much worse than a good communication, in creating for those who experience it the sense of real contact with another world. The unconscious and unknown powers of the living are so vast and so deep that it would appear to be a matter of ordinary scientific caution to attribute, as far as we may, to these unknown powers of the living the rich panoply of capacities which are often conceived to be the expressions of surviving selves.

Passing on to the question of the internal consistency of the survival evidence, the question was raised whether there is not at times too much evasion and slipperiness to make it easy to believe that great men and great scholars are in fact involved in the production of the communications. It was urged that the current clichés about "confusion" attending the process of communication do not get to the heart of the difficulty.

Once again, for emphasis, let it be stressed that our concern in this paper is with that critical spirit in the light of which better evidence, more adequate scientific work, must be done. The questions which are raised here are by no means definitive. A negative case of this sort has its own inherent weaknesses and inadequacies.

When I ask myself whether I personally accept these objections, and repudiate the evidence for survival, I find myself answering that it is improbable that the issue has been correctly stated at all. I think it probable that five hundred years hence the arguments both pro and con will sound childish and superficial, if indeed they sound relevant to the problem at all. Similarly, in dealing with the domain of normal, "everyday" psychology, altogether apart from psychical research, the temptation is to reach premature conclusions before questions have been rightly stated, just as it has at times happened in all the sciences. In Newton's time, men argued whether light was *matter* or *form*; Newton

threw his weight in favor of the interpretation in terms of matter. From about 1800 to a few years ago, this "corpuscular" theory was discredited, and the emphasis on form (wave-theory) prevailed. We know today that both notions were inadequate; light is matter and form—both and neither—for the question was not rightly stated. In the same way, it is likely that we neither survive nor (to coin a term) "non-survive," or that we do both or neither, depending upon what aspect of personality is involved, and upon the definition of survival. We simply have no frame of reference for a proper formulation of the question.

Often a more appropriate attitude in science than belief or disbelief is to say: "It would be sheer chicanery to pretend that I have a right to an opinion." This is a point of view which may properly have a strong claim upon our allegiance in psychical research. We may well respect those who, like Drayton Thomas, have reached an honest conclusion in favor of full survival of personality after death, or those who, like Professor Dodds, wholeheartedly reject the hypothesis. But another position which is fully as defensible at the present time is that of saying that the case rests upon dead center, waiting for evidence *so good*, or objections *so sound*, as to warrant forming a judgment.

Upon one who sees the issue in this way rests the obligation to state as well as he can in what way the problem of survival should be defined, what types of survival evidence would in fact be completely adequate, and what types of objections would really be final. An attempt to fulfill this obligation will be made in these pages at a later time.